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Doctor Paul, Detective; Or, Under a Terrible Spell.

BY LEON LEWIS.



"SHE'S SHARP, AND SO ARE HER PARENTS AND THAT YOUNG DOCTOR!" HE MUTTERED. "BUT I'M SHARPER."

Doctor Paul, Detective;

OR,

UNDER A TERRIBLE SPELL.

BY LEON LEWIS,

AUTHOR OF "THE RANCHER'S FOUR MILLIONS,"
"COWBOY COURIERS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

WAS HE A "LORD."

SOMEWHAT later than his wont, Mr. Boyd Feathergill reached home, in an aristocratic quarter of New York, after a busy and eventful day at his office.

His step was slow and heavy, and his features displayed an unusual pallor and rigidity, despite his efforts to control his agitation.

As he ascended the front steps of his elegant residence, the door was opened from within, and his wife appeared to his gaze, white and trembling, as if pained and scared beyond expression.

"Dockery has been here again, Boyd, as threatened," she announced, wringing her hands excitedly. "I could not get rid of him for a less sum than that mentioned in his letter of yesterday, *ten thousand dollars!*"

The husband looked dazed for a moment, as he stepped into the hall, closing the door behind him.

"Did any one see him come or go?" he queried.

"Not a soul."

"Then the secret is still safe! And that's the essential!"

Drawing the lady's arm within his own, and carefully supporting her steps, Mr. Feathergill conducted her to a large sofa in the parlor and gently seated her upon it, placing an easy-cushion at her back and another at her feet.

Although a chronic invalid, with a thin, fragile form, Mrs. Feathergill possessed a sweet face and bright eyes, with an habitual sunny disposition, as if the inevitable sufferings and pains she had experienced had only drawn her nearer to the higher realities and attainments of existence.

"You are later than usual, my dear husband," she said, after she had acknowledged with a grateful look his lover-like attentions.

"Yes, Sadie. We've had a great deal on our hands to-day."

He drew up a chair and sat down beside his wife, strangely preoccupied, nervous and wretched.

"You look troubled, too," pursued Mrs. Feathergill.

"It's quite likely. We have had some anxieties to-day of which I will speak later."

The merchant sighed wearily, with visible efforts to repress his excitement.

"You have had no return of your dizzy spells?" queried the wife, her loving glances searching his face.

"Nothing to speak of, Sadie. A mere reminder of the old attacks. And you?"

"I've had some sharp pains, but seem about as well as usual. I chatted a long time with Mrs. Braddon and Miss Wilmot, who called together."

The noisy cries of a newsboy, who was just turning an adjacent corner, suddenly fell upon the hearing of the couple, who had become silent, as if indisposed to enter upon the discussion just then of the troubles at which they had mutually hinted.

With a scarcely perceptible start the merchant raised his head and listened.

"Extra! All about the great burglary!" was the announcement that arrested his attention.

Stepping to the front door, Mr. Feathergill secured a copy of an evening paper and hastily glanced over its pages.

"Sure enough!" he muttered, under his breath, as his hand involuntarily crushed the paper. "*Here it is!*"

As he faced about to return to the parlor, a lovely girl came tripping lightly down the long flight of stairs, her face brightening vividly at sight of him.

"Home again?" she murmured, with ravishing sensibility, as she laid her golden head upon his breast and looked fondly up into his face. "How weary you look, papa! I'm afraid we kept you up too late last night with our reception."

"Oh, not at all, Regie," returned the merchant, pressing a kiss upon the fair forehead. "Speaking of our reception," and he passed his arm protectingly around her, escorting her to the presence of Mrs. Feathergill, "I have news for you! No less than three of our guests of last evening have visited me to-day at the office—for what, do you think? To ask my permission to pay their addresses to you!"

"Really, papa?" cried the maiden, with a blush that heightened her rare loveliness. "And who are the famous three, if you please?"

The merchant made a successful attempt to force his anxieties and preoccupations into the background and proceeded to name the incipient suitors, the maiden receiving every name with such comments as to show that none of them made any impression upon her.

"And what did you tell them, dear papa?" she asked, in a somewhat constrained manner, as she nervously caressed Mrs. Feathergill, to whose side she had advanced.

"What *could* I tell them, you little mischief, except that any one agreeable to you would not be objectionable to your mother and myself? Was not that about the answer to make, Regie?"

"The very thing, papa."

"A fourth would-be suitor, Lawyer Sniffin, has also called upon me," added the merchant, "but he has no claims whatever to your attention, Regie, and I acted accordingly."

"What did you say to him?"

"I told him I would consult you, as opportunity offered, and return to the subject later, if there should be any occasion to do so."

"Quite right. Speaking of suitors," said Regie, as she drew her father to an easy-chair and sat down beside him with a sudden glow upon her cheeks, "it will hardly be a surprise to you to hear that I have a lover! Perhaps I ought to have made my little confession sooner, but I have been back from Europe only a week, and I wanted to be quite sure of my own mind before communicating a word on the subject. The gentleman in question is an Englishman. He comes of an ancient and honorable family, and is the possessor of a handsome fortune in his own right, to say nothing of his great expectations. In a word, he is Lord Pennington, the son and heir of the Duke of Highlandshire. He loves me very much, and I have given him my promise, subject of course to your approval, to become his wife about the middle of the coming month!"

The first sensations of Mr. and Mrs. Feathergill at this communication were profoundly painful, their plans for the maiden having been of a very different nature.

The mother was the first to speak.

"You have given us a great surprise, my child," she declared. "We had hoped to see you take a liking to young Hudnutt. What are your sentiments concerning him?"

"I like him very much as a friend, not otherwise."

"Poor fellow! He loves you! But tell us more about this Lord Pennington, and how you became acquainted with him!"

"I made his acquaintance in Venice," said Regie. "He was stopping at the same hotel as ourselves. He was pointed out to me by Mattie Brown, who had already been introduced to him, and at my desire she presented him to me. He seemed to be attracted to me as quickly as strongly, and I, for my part, found myself as pleased as flattered by his very marked attentions."

The mother stirred uneasily, as one under the influence of a painful dream.

So perished her hopes!

"In a word," continued the girl, with a flush of nervous excitement, "the deportment of Lord Pennington was such that I could not long remain indifferent to him. I could not consent that he should join our party for the balance of the tour, for such consent was not mine to give, but neither could I prevent him from visiting the same cities and stopping at the same hotels as ourselves, and in this way he was a great deal with me until our arrival in Paris, where I gave him a definite affirmative to his oft-repeated demand for my hand."

A half-repressed groan came from the pale lips of Mrs. Feathergill, and then all was still.

A pin could have been heard to drop upon the marble-top table in the center of the parlor.

"I had intended to speak of these matters this very evening, mamma—first to you and papa, and then to Paul," pursued the maiden, a little nervously and unsteadily. "As you are both aware, I have always thought a great deal of Paul, as was natural, seeing that we have grown up together. Paul has always been the

best of friends. He has ever seemed to me like a brother! I am aware, too, that it has been your wish, and papa's, to see Paul and myself more closely united. But I realized that I loved Lord Pennington as I had never loved Paul—in such a way, in fact, as to tell me that my regard for Paul had only been that of one sincere and admiring friend for another—and I found myself unable to resist the earnest and impassioned pleadings of his lordship for me to become his wife. If I have done wrong, my dear parents," and she seized a hand of each, caressing them tenderly, "I hope to be forgiven."

"There's nothing to forgive, my dear child," returned Mrs. Feathergill, in a very tender and yearning tone, but none the less with a sad and disappointed look. "Love goes where it is sent, and your father and I would never think for a moment of attempting to control your affections in any way, shape, or manner. Our one wish, like our one thought, is always for your happiness. We can only hope that you have not allowed yourself to be influenced by the glamour of a title, by an ambition to figure as Lady Pennington, and that the man of your choice is worthy of the pure heart you have to give him."

"Thank you, dearest mamma," cried Regie, kissing Mrs. Feathergill with impulsive effusiveness. "I knew you would give me your blessing. And you, papa?"

"It's only the old story, it seems, of our American girls going abroad to secure titled husbands," observed Mrs. Feathergill with a gloomy countenance. "Of course Regie is not the first to make a conquest upon the other side of the water, nor will she be the last."

"But of course we must know who and what this Lord Pennington is before this matter goes further," declared Mrs. Feathergill, who was evidently greatly pained at the turn affairs had taken. "There are pretended lords as well as real ones, and many a real lord who is not fit to tie the shoes of such a man as Paul Hudnutt."

"You will find his lordship's name in 'Burke's Peerage' or in any similar work," said Regie, with visible pride, "as also the various titles and family connections of his father, the Duke of Highlandshire. Ernest—as his lordship desires me to call him—has shown me numerous letters from home which were perfectly crowded with evidences of their authenticity, and which bore all the necessary stamps and postmarks to prove that they were written where they were dated. As to what Ernest is like," and she blushed between pride and tenderness, "you shall judge for yourselves, as far as you can do so from a picture."

She produced an imperial photograph of her titled betrothed, and it was in due course passed from Mrs. Feathergill to her husband in silence.

Regie was pained to see that it did not arouse the least enthusiasm on the part of the observers.

"It seems to me that I have seen that man," said Mrs. Feathergill. "I am sure—positively sure—he passed the house yesterday, just after you went around to Mattie's."

"Impossible!" cried Regie, with a barely noticeable inflection of annoyance. "If his lordship were in the city he would not lose a single moment in calling upon me."

"Nevertheless the face is familiar," persisted Mrs. Feathergill. "I would be willing to take oath that I have seen the original of this photograph. Where was his lordship when you last saw him, Regie?"

"In Paris," was the answer, as Regie restored the unappreciated picture to her pocket, with a half-complaining air. "He left Paris three days before we did. He received information that his mother was seriously ill, and could do no less than hasten to Highlandshire to see her."

"Did you see the letter which brought the news of this illness?" asked the merchant, with a critical and inquiring air unusual to him.

"I did. His lordship came to my room with it in his hand. But I did not read it. I was too absorbed in his lordship's departure."

"Have you heard from his lordship since his lordship left you in Paris?" asked the mother.

"You should say, mamma, 'since he left you in Paris.' There is no necessity of dragging in the title when the pronoun will do as well."

"This question will no doubt trouble us all in the future, Regie," said the merchant; "at least until familiarity with Lord Pennington has made it easy for us to decide when to say 'he' and when to say 'his lordship.' But you did not answer your mother's question. Have you heard from Lord Pennington since your return to America?"

The maiden shook her head with a somewhat

troubled countenance, as she realized that her parents were instinctively manifesting a decided antipathy to her betrothed.

"It seems to me high time for a letter, if his lordship's love is ardent, and especially if he desires you to know how his mother is," added Mr. Feathergill. "He could have been in America six days ahead of you, if such had been his desire."

"How so, papa?"

"Why, he could have taken the Alaska, or some other 'ocean greyhound' from Liverpool, with or without pausing to see his mother, and he would have reached New York in seven days, whereas you took the French line and were ten, and he had three days the start, so that there is really room for the six days I have mentioned. If his lordship had written you within five days after his return to England, the letter would be in your hands at this moment."

The maiden moved uneasily in her chair, with a sudden and marked increase of color.

"If his lordship came to America direct from Paris for any purpose or reason," added the merchant, half unconsciously, as though speaking to himself rather than to his company, "that fact would explain exactly why you have not heard from him."

"I am sure Ernest has written," Regie declared. "He would not have let a single day pass without doing so. His letter must have been miscarried."

The husband and wife exchanged glances of intelligence which spoke volumes.

The pretended miscarriage of letters is the one orthodox way of explaining the non-arrival of letters which have never been written.

"Well, dismissing that point," said the merchant, "what was the understanding with which Ernest—I suppose I, too, may call him Ernest—took leave of you in Paris? Does he intend to follow you to America?"

"Naturally," returned Regie. "It was agreed that Ernest should join me here as soon as his mother's health would permit. He also spoke of some business which would have to be attended to before he could take such a long voyage."

"Perhaps he intends to surprise you by his presence in person," suggested Mrs. Feathergill, "and that is why he has not written."

"That's indeed likely," agreed Regie, catching eagerly at the suggestion. "He has given me many a surprise in Europe! Two or three times he failed to connect when I expected him, and on other occasions he appeared suddenly when I supposed him to be hundreds of miles distant."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Feathergill, with a somewhat singular smile. "His lordship appears somewhat erratic! Did he offer any explanation of these 'surprises,' Regie?"

"Always. But I paid very little attention to them. I felt that it was mere good nature on his part to account to me for any change in his plans and movements."

A brief interval of silence succeeded—a silence that was full of thoughtfulness for all, even for Regie.

"You did not tell me, mamma, how you like the picture of Ernest," then said the girl, with the air of seeking relief from her thoughts.

Mrs. Feathergill aroused herself, with a sigh.

"All I can say," she responded, "is of course of no account, as it is only an impression. But my impression is not favorable to the suitor you have chosen. There is a wide difference, it seems to me, between that face and the honest, noble countenance of Paul Hudnutt! Forgive me if I pain you, my dear child. You have asked me to say something on this subject, and I can only speak as I feel."

For a moment Regie seemed inclined to manifest some annoyance at these declarations, but a little reflection told her that any such sentiment would be wholly improper.

Instead of complaining, therefore, she invited her father by a look to make known his opinion.

"Your mother's opinion is also mine, Regie," declared the merchant, regretfully. "The face of your betrothed is both striking and handsome. He is evidently a man of capacity and experience, a man who has seen a great deal of life, in a word, a man of the world! He's about twice your age, is he not?"

"He is forty-two!"

"Then think what must have been his experience, Regie, even in all questions of the heart!" said the merchant, thoughtfully. "I will not say that his age is a bar to true affection—far from it. But with his name, position, and fortune, he is morally certain to have gone the

whole round of human experiences, and I very much question if he has brought to you a heart like that you are bringing to him. The firmness of his features, especially the mouth, approaches hardness, or grimness, not to say a cold and selfish heartlessness, and I should certainly want a thorough understanding of his status and surroundings before resigning you to his mercy!"

Turning away and glancing at his watch, Mr. Feathergill advanced to one of the front windows and scanned the street in both directions.

"Are you expecting company to dinner, Boyd?" asked Mrs. Feathergill, whose glances, as usual, had followed her husband's movements.

"Only young Hudnutt," was the answer. "And here he comes!"

CHAPTER II.

TERRIBLE PROBLEMS!

REGIE turned toward the door, with a gesture which signified that she would give the newcomer admittance, and hastened to acquit herself of this service.

"I wish they had become lovers!" sighed Mrs. Feathergill, looking after the radiant girl, with sadness and foreboding in every line of her face.

"So do I," returned the merchant. "Their union has long been my one great hope and desire!"

Dr. Paul Hudnutt was already a celebrity and authority in medical circles, although still considerably under thirty years of age.

He was the only son of a famous physician who had long been the family adviser of the Feathergills, and had very naturally succeeded his father in these relations.

He was the possessor of a remarkably fine physique, and his presence was as commanding as his talents, although the thoughtful gravity of his disposition was exquisitely tempered with geniality and good-nature.

"So you do me the honor of letting me in yourself, Regie?" was the young doctor's smiling greeting, as he pressed the hand offered him.

"You are none the worse, I see, for the supper and dance which followed the reception. And Mrs. Feathergill?"

"Mamma has naturally been a little fatigued and *souffrante* to-day, but otherwise as well as usual."

"Your father has arrived from the office?"

The maiden assented.

"Here's a bouquet composed wholly of your favorite flowers," said the handsome young doctor, presenting the object of his remark, as he arrested his steps a moment in the wide, well-lighted hall. "Will you kindly accept it, with my sincerest esteem and best wishes?"

"Oh, how beautiful!" exclaimed Regie, inhaling the odor of the flowers. "I thank you ever so much, Doctor Hudnutt."

"Paul, if you please," suggested the visitor. "Have I not always been Paul to you?" and his earnest glances lingered as tenderly as admiringly upon her glowing countenance. "Why should we change all that because you have been away a few months in Europe?"

"Paul, then," returned the girl, smilingly, as she raised the bouquet anew to her nostrils. "You have not forgotten what my favorites are."

"As if I could ever forget anything that is dear to you!" exclaimed Paul, with a grave, gentle smile. "I have here, too, the book you had looked for in vain—Mireson's *Astronomie*!"

"In the original, as I desired," said Regie, taking the book. "How good of you! What a lovely binding! I shall prize the work more because it comes from you than for itself, as much as I was charmed by the pages I found time to read in the copy encountered abroad. You have brought your medicine-case, I see."

"Yes, Regie. I had to make a professional call on my way hither. Besides," and a look of concern crept into his face, "I may have occasion to change your mother's medicine in the course of the evening."

"Tell me, Paul," and the fair face bent nearer, a gentle touch upon the arm detaining him, "are you satisfied with the state of my mother's health?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because she seems to have had some serious indisposition to-day during my absence. I was almost shocked upon my return from a walk to see how she had changed."

"Such a change as would be caused by bad news or a disagreeable visit?"

"Exactly!"

"I presume the change in question had some such cause," ventured Paul, after a brief silence.

"In giving a general answer to your question in regard to your mother's health, I can do no less than admit that her case is one of my most serious preoccupations. A physician can be 'satisfied' only with the complete restoration of his patient to health. That is a boon which can never be your mother's. Her forces are slowly but surely lessening and weakening. I have given her case more time and study than you are aware of; have done all any one can do; but the inevitable end can even now be foreseen. My treatment of her is merely palliative, not curative."

The maiden choked back a sob that stirred her soul to its depths, while the gentle touch which had been laid upon the arm of the young physician became a convulsive clutch.

"And papa? poor papa?" she faltered.

"The state of his health is as far as possible from what I would like it to be," answered Hudnutt, frankly. "A sudden shock of any kind might kill him at any moment!"

The girl bowed her head upon the young doctor's shoulder a few moments, unable to master immediately the emotions surging in her soul.

"There is no other girl of my acquaintance to whom I could say such things," added Hudnutt. "But you told me—long before you went abroad—that you wanted me to deal with you in all these matters with perfect good faith and frankness; to talk to you as to a *confrère* or to another self. I complied with your wishes then, even as I am ready to comply with them now. Need I add," and he inclined his handsome figure with as much grace as dignity, "that I shall always remain in all things and in every respect entirely at your disposal?"

"A thousand thanks, Paul," murmured Regie, with a quick, strange glow upon her cheeks, as she pressed his hand gratefully. "I may soon put your devotion to the test—sooner than you think," and a preoccupied, far-away look came into her eyes. "In regard to these painful confidences respecting my parents, no one can blame us. It is better for me to know their situation. I should deem it a very unworthy weakness if I could permit myself to remain ignorant of the gravity of their afflictions. These problems of life and death must be faced by all sooner or later, and it is wicked to ignore or shirk them. Do you agree with me, Paul?"

"Perfectly, my dear Regie. The course we have taken is the only one you would have been content to follow."

The young couple proceeded to the parlor, where the visitor was warmly greeted by the merchant and his wife, the latter offering her hand.

"I was sorry, Paul, that we did not see more of you last evening," she said. "You were called away by an urgent case, I think?"

The doctor assented.

"It's one of the penalties he has to pay for being so popular," explained the merchant, forcing a smile. "A doctor's time is never his own. I have often thought that the practice of medicine is the most disagreeable of professions."

"It certainly has some severe drawbacks," admitted Hudnutt, with his usual genial gravity. "But it also has some very great compensations. More than once I have saved persons from the grave who had been given up to die by other doctors. Think what an intense joy it is to be able to attain to such results!"

Dinner was announced at this moment, and Regie and the doctor led the way to the dining-room, which was in the front basement, Mr. Feathergill giving his arm to his wife.

The meal was soon pleasantly in progress, the merchant and Paul exerting themselves, as if by some previous understanding, to keep the conversation running in agreeable channels, and Regie coming as effectively as unconsciously to their assistance by relating brilliantly some curious episodes of her latest travels.

"You are not eating anything, Boyd," soon remarked Mrs. Feathergill. "You must follow my example and leave all anxieties and annoyances outside of the dining-room."

"I shall certainly try to do so," returned the merchant, as he helped himself liberally to the roast beef which occupied the post of honor. "Time enough to discuss bad news when we come to the dessert. Is it not so, doctor?"

"That is certainly my view of things," replied the young physician, with a glance as searching as short at the invalid's face. "It is part of my creed that the ills of life are best combated upon a full stomach."

A pleasant, if somewhat forced, conversation succeeded.

"You spoke of anxieties at the office, Boyd," said Mrs. Feathergill, when dinner was nearly

over. "Is it any too soon to say a word about them?"

"Not if you are prepared for a very serious surprise," answered the merchant, looking from his wife to his daughter with a countenance as indicative of courage as of trouble. "I certainly have some very grave news to communicate."

The mother and daughter suspended proceedings on the instant, bestowing a long glance of inquiry upon the features of the husband and father, and then turning to young Hudnutt.

"You are already the possessor of the information in question, Paul?" murmured the maiden.

"I am, Regie," was the answer. "Your father feared for the effect of his 'news' upon your mother and desired me to be present."

The ladies exchanged startled glances, both of them paling visibly.

Clearly enough, there was something very serious to come.

"But you must both be very brave—brave as I am," enjoined Mr. Feathergill, sternly repressing his agitation. "Not to worry you with unnecessary fears and apprehensions, I will come at once to the point. Our safe at the Union Deposit Company has been robbed of everything in it!"

"Robbed!" gasped Mrs. Feathergill.

"Of everything!" supplemented Regie.

The husband silently assented, and Paul responded to an inquiring glance from the ladies with a nod of confirmation.

"But how robbed?" demanded Regie, after a few moments of dumb consternation.

"With a duplicate key and a forged letter purporting to come from you, Regie!"

"From me!"

The maiden raised her hands in horror.

"The robbery took place soon after ten o'clock this morning," continued the merchant. "A man presented himself in the uniform of a district messenger at the office of the company, and said you had sent him for a certain paper, producing a key of the safe and a forged letter. Not the least suspicion was aroused. The pretended messenger was given admittance to the vaults, and quietly took his departure a few moments thereafter. Then, as is so often the case, a vague mistrust or uneasiness appears to have seized upon the official who had taken part in the transaction, and he came hurrying to my office. At the first mention of a key and a letter I comprehended the situation. I hurried to the office of the deposit company, but too late! Our private safe had been completely emptied!"

A gasping cry of distress came from Mrs. Feathergill, but she could neither move or speak. As to Regie, she sat as if petrified.

"You both comprehend what the robbery means," resumed the merchant, after wiping his damp forehead. "All your diamonds were in that safe—all our bonds, exceeding two hundred and fifty thousand dollars—and all our private papers! We have no clew to the identity of the thief, and it is unlikely that we shall ever obtain any. As to the recovery of the stolen property, it would be simple folly to ever hope to see a dollar of it."

The ladies still sat as if stunned.

The robbery meant ruin—absolute ruin!

"I have no doubt, however, that the key used by the robber was the one you lost in Paris, Regie," added the father, "and it is equally clear that the robber has in some way become acquainted with your handwriting. The letter purporting to come from you is cleverly done. It might have even deceived me. Here it is."

He handed the letter to Regie, who started violently at sight of it, and continued to stare at it for a few moments as if fascinated.

Then the blood began receding from her face until it became as white as marble.

She passed her hand two or three times uneasily over her forehead, the merchant and Hudnutt not taking their eyes from her.

"Somehow—there is something here that seems familiar," she faltered. "I—I—"

She caught her breath sharply, trembling in every limb.

Some awful fear, recollection, or possibility seemed to have assailed her.

Her jeweled hand again flitted uneasily over her white temples.

Evidently she found her brain tenanted by some phantom whose outlines she could not clearly define!

"Could—could such a letter have been written unconsciously?" she demanded, looking from the merchant to the physician. "Through me, for instance, by the agency of another, while in a mesmeric state?"

"Mesmeric state!" echoed Mrs. Feathergill, with a gathering terror in her eyes. "What

should you know of mesmerism, my dear child? What has mesmerism to do with this matter?"

"We saw something of it—the other girls and I—in Paris, mamma," faltered Regie. "There were several professors and other persons there who did most wonderful things, and a thought struck me—I was merely wondering if—"

She paused suddenly, as if at a loss how to express her exact meaning.

"But this letter, Regie," cried the mother. "You certainly did not write this letter?"

"Certainly not," answered Regie, in visible dismay, "at least not consciously—"

"Not consciously!" echoed Mrs. Feathergill, struggling with some withering dread which had entered her soul. "Merciful heavens! Do you mean to say that you may have written the letter unconsciously?"

"I—I do not know what to think," stammered Regie, in the deepest distress and bewilderment. "During the last few days of our stay in Paris, I attended a *séance* of mesmerists, at Lord Pennington's suggestion, and it was also by his lordship's suggestion that I afterward received a distinguished professor of mesmerism, in the presence of Mattie Brown and a few others, in my private apartments!"

"Did this distinguished professor mesmerize you, Regie?" asked the merchant, abruptly.

"He did, papa—at Lord Pennington's suggestion."

"With or without your consent?"

"With it, naturally."

"And they found you susceptible?"

"Not so much so as some of the other girls," answered Regie, "but, after one or two vain attempts, the professor succeeded in putting me into a magnetic sleep."

"And in this 'magnetic sleep' you knew nothing of what was going on around you?"

"Not the least thing, papa."

"Horrible!" commented the merchant.

"Then you may have written this letter under the influence of those terrible men!" cried Mrs. Feathergill, wildly. "And if you wrote the letter, you may also have given them the duplicate key of the safe! You may also have told them all our secrets in your 'magnetic sleep'! They may have preceded or followed you to America! They may even be hovering around you at this very moment! 'Lord Pennington' may be no lord at all, but simply one of these 'magnetic' fiends and impostors! Your lover may be a mere phantom of your imagination. Oh! what dreadful and mysterious problems you are suggesting, Regie! You are in the hands of harpies! You are under a terrible spell! Oh, Boyd! Boyd!"

Clutching wildly at the arm of her husband, as he sprang to her side, Mrs. Feathergill sunk back in her chair in a deathlike swoon.

"Ah! that face! that face!" shrieked Regie, as she sprang to her feet and pointed with outstretched arm toward one of the front windows of the dining-room. "The professor here!"

And she fell heavily forward into the arms of the young doctor, who saw that she also had fainted.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE CALL.

THE merchant was at no loss to understand his wife's sudden fainting-spell.

She had realized, with all the force of a shock, the grave and fateful complications which were destined to result from the connection of Regie with "Lord Pennington."

With the keen and subtle insight so common to her sex, she had realized that falsehood, imposture and wickedness were rampant in all these new events and relations.

But the swoon of Regie?

That was a more mysterious matter.

Whom had she seen at the window?

Of course the condition of the ladies received instant attention.

"I had better give them both a stimulant I use with success in such cases," suggested the young doctor, as he laid Regie on a lounge. "It will help bring them around, and will strengthen them afterward!"

The merchant assenting, the stimulant was duly administered.

The daughter was the first to respond to the effect of the medicine, opening her eyes, after a few moans, and gaining a sitting posture, with the aid of the young doctor.

"How foolish of me!" she ejaculated, passing her hand over her forehead in a sort of dazed way, as she had done before. "But I was startled. I thought I saw at the window the

face of the distinguished professor of mesmerism of whom I had been speaking!"

"Perhaps you *did* see him!" returned the father, with a thoughtful air. "It is more than suggested by this day's villainy that your dubious acquaintance has come to America. Perhaps he's the thief!"

The maiden stole an apprehensive glance at the window.

"At any rate, he's gone now!" she said, with a sigh of relief. "But I'm forgetting mamma. Let me help you!"

She joined her father and young Hudnutt in chafing the hands, wrists and temples of the patient, in holding salts to her nostrils, and in taking the various other measures usual in such cases, such as fanning the patient, giving her fresh air, etc.

The result was even more satisfactory than the physician or Mr. Feathergill would have dared to hope for, in view of what they knew in regard to the weakness of the patient, for it was not long before she stirred uneasily and opened her eyes.

"Please carry me up to the parlor," she requested.

The transfer was quickly effected, without removing her from the chair she had occupied at the dining-table, and in which she had been perfectly recumbent—the doctor having tilted it backward—and she was placed gently upon the sofa she had occupied before dinner.

At this moment the door-bell announced a visitor.

"I will answer it," said Mr. Feathergill, taking his way toward the entrance.

He was absent several minutes from the parlor, and came back looking more disturbed than ever.

"The caller is Mr. Basswood, one of the detectives in charge of the case," he reported. "He has no clew to the thieves or thief, and cannot learn that the bonds have been sold. In a word, he knows no more about the thief and his proceedings than we knew this morning."

He heaved a deep sigh and added:

"You see how perfectly justified I was in taking such a gloomy view of the situation."

"Of course a description of the bonds has been telegraphed to all the great commercial centers?" queried Paul.

"Yes. But that may be a lost labor. The thief may have sold the bonds within five minutes after they came into his possession, in which case the purchaser is likely for the present to keep his own counsel. Even stolen bonds can be worked off on country customers, or sent to foreign countries, in such a way as to recoup the innocent purchaser, or the purchaser may in time be able to negotiate with the owners or the thieves for a portion of the amount at issue."

Paul was only too keenly alive to the correctness of these views, and did not attempt to gainsay them.

"I have already spent thousands of dollars in telegraphing and in detectives," added the merchant, "and it is doubtful if a single penny of it will ever come back to me."

"Let us at least remain hopeful," said Mrs. Feathergill, with a firmness that would hardly have been expected of her. "I am all right again, except very weak, and shall be glad to resume the investigation upon which we had entered. We were speaking of the feats or performances of sundry mesmerists in Paris. By the way, Paul, you ought, as a doctor, to have some information about mesmerism, or at least an opinion. Is it a science or a fraud? What are we to think of it?"

"It is generally agreed by men of science, including medical scientists," replied Paul, "that there are some very mysterious and yet undeniable forces and facts behind the phenomena of mesmerism. In other words, 'there's something in it!' But it is also agreed that the persons who dabble in mesmerism are usually of a kind it is well to keep at a distance, and it is certain that those who make the most noise in this field are unblushing impostors and scoundrels!"

"My view exactly," murmured Mrs. Feathergill.

"Mine also," declared the merchant.

Regie, who had seated herself on the sofa, at her mother's feet, flushed as deeply as if these declarations had been personal aspersions.

At the same time she moved uneasily, with a sort of shudder, or perceptible thrill, and sent a fixed, yet vacant gaze in the direction of the doors leading from the parlor, as if some disquieting but well-defined influence had struck her from that quarter.

"Before another word is said, Paul," said Mrs. Feathergill, motioning the young doctor to a chair beside her, "it is my duty to tell you

that Regie has 'met her fate' during her absence in Europe. She is engaged to marry Lord Pennington whose name has once or twice appeared on our lips since your arrival."

A start and a flush sufficiently betrayed the pain these words caused the young physician.

It seemed as if he could not at first accept them as serious, or as if he could not quite comprehend their purport; then, after a quick glance at Regie, his features paled to the hue of marble.

"You will forgive me, Paul, as my dear parents have done, if I have given you pain," pleaded the girl, laying her hand gently upon his arm. "I am sure you will appreciate Lord Pennington when you see him. I hope you and his lordship will always remain the best of friends. Forgive me!"

There was a brief silence, as the young doctor struggled manfully for the mastery of his emotions, and then he said, with a sad, regretful tenderness:

"There can be nothing in what you tell me, Regie, that demands my forgiveness. I have no claims of any kind upon you. I will not deny that I have of late cherished the hope of winning your love, but I shall only replace that feeling by an equally ardent hope for your happiness, and shall remain as earnestly and devotedly your friend in the future as in the past."

"Thank you, Paul," murmured Regie, flashing upon him a grateful look from her tear-gemmed eyes. "Be assured that my very warmest friendship and esteem will always be yours!"

There was another brief silence, during which Mrs. Feathergill wept quietly and unobtrusively, but with a depth of feeling which attested how earnestly the projected union of Regie and Paul had commanded all her hopes and wishes.

"Tell me something about my favored rival," then said Paul, with an attempt at playfulness which was designed to hide the pain gnawing at his heart. "Have you seen him, Mr. Feathergill?"

"Not yet," answered the merchant, "and it's very little that my wife and I know about him. Such facts as Regie gave us a few minutes before your arrival are all we can give you!"

The communication was soon finished, and Paul heaved a gloomy sigh of comprehension.

He seemed even more pained on Regie's account than on his own.

"I understand now why Regie has seemed so greatly changed since her return from Europe," he declared. "She has seemed to me at times to be under some strange spell!"

The maiden fidgeted uneasily on the sofa, while her glances turned fixedly and yet vacantly in the same direction they had previously taken.

"But I am glad to know the worst," added the young doctor, with a gloomy smile. "Nor do I wonder at Regie's conquest. It would have been strange if Lord Pennington had remained insensible to her charms and graces!"

Regie flashed at him a grateful glance.

"It is understood, then, that you two will remain friends?" queried Mrs. Feathergill, recovering her self-control, and looking with mingled affection and admiration from one to the other. "An assurance to this effect is the only consolation you can now give me!"

"Then I am sure we shall not withhold it," declared Regie, caressing her mother effusively. "Am I not right, Paul?"

"Perfectly, Regie. We shall always remain friends, whatever may happen."

The shadows of evening were now closing in, and Regie, at a suggestion from her mother, proceeded to draw the curtains and light the gas, a task to which she habitually gave her attention.

"And now to resume our inquiry or discussion, whatever we may call it, my dear child," said Mrs. Feathergill, as Regie returned to her side. "Between the robbery of to-day and sundry events with which you were associated in Paris, there seems to be a thread of connection. Just what that connection is, Regie, is a matter we can undertake to decide only after hearing all the information you have to offer. There's something wrong in your dealings with those mesmerists, that's certain! Is not this the view we take of the situation, Boyd?"

"Most assuredly," replied the merchant. "The experiences of Regie with those mesmerists in Paris undoubtedly claim our most earnest attention, and I begin to have a hope that they will furnish a clue to the villainy which has this day brought us to the verge of utter ruin!"

"We'll resume our inquiry, Regie," said Mrs.

Feathergill, "by asking you for the name of the 'distinguished professor of mesmerism' of whom we were speaking a few moments ago."

"Here's his card," was Regie's answer, as she produced a slip of pasteboard from her pocket. "The address given is that of a public hall where the professor gave two or three lectures."

The card was passed around.

It bore the name of "Henry Croppe, Professor of Magnetic Sciences," but contained nothing concerning the professor's references, hours of reception, or terms.

"May I keep it?" asked Paul, holding the card hesitatingly in his hand.

As simple as was the question, Regie experienced a sense of annoyance at it, realizing that her assent would consign the card to very unsympathetic hands.

She assented, however, after a visible hesitation.

"You do not have a *carte* of the gentleman, I suppose?" continued the young physician.

"Yes, if it's of any interest to you," replied Regie, a little ungraciously, as she produced a photograph from her pocket and gave it to him. "What is there strange about my having it? The professor is a public character, and as such probably circulates his *cartes* by the hundred!"

Paul placed both the card and the portrait under his medicine-case, which lay on the table near him.

"Did the professor give them to you, Regie?" asked the mother, with keen attention to all that was transpiring.

"No, mamma; they were shown me by Lord Pennington, and I retained them."

"Didn't his lordship ever ask you to return them, Regie?" asked Paul.

The young girl flushed more vividly than before.

It was even evident from her manner that an angry response had presented itself to her lips; but she suppressed these signs of annoyance promptly and answered:

"I cannot see as the matter is of the least consequence. Nevertheless, I am frank enough to say that Lord Pennington *did* ask me for both the card and the photograph!"

"Then why didn't you return them?" questioned the merchant.

"Because they were with a lot of other things in the bottom of my trunk, and I could not readily put hands upon them."

"Otherwise you would have returned them?" asked Mrs. Feathergill.

"Most assuredly."

"Not getting them upon his first demand, did Lord Pennington ask you a second time for the card and the photograph?" asked Paul.

The maiden's flush deepened and a strange tremor shook her form.

"Yes, he did," she answered.

"You said he *showed* them to you," observed Mr. Feathergill, with a voice and mien indicative of the closest attention to the conversation.

"You did not say he *gave* them to you. As you look back at the transaction at this time and distance, is it not perfectly easy to see that Lord Pennington did not intend that you should retain either the card or the picture?"

The girl did not immediately reply.

She had the appearance of looking back into her memory, as suggested.

"Well?" suggested the merchant, with smiling persistence.

"Well, I remember that Ernest seemed surprised at my taking them away with me," avowed Regie. "He certainly gave a great deal more thought to their restoration than I did, or he would have had them."

"And you never asked yourself the secret of this persistence? If he had wanted the cards and photographs of Professor Croppe, couldn't he have readily had them by the dozen, according to your own showing?"

"I suppose he could," admitted Regie.

"Then what he wanted was to get the card and photograph out of your hands."

"And why out of my hands, papa?"

"So that they could not be used by detectives or others, in case of an inquiry into his relations to the professor."

"Detectives!" exclaimed Regie.

She was now really angry and her aspect literally bristling.

"It seems very strange that you should all take hold of these trifles with as much interest as if Lord Pennington and his associates were villains and as if you had all become amateur detectives," she declared, in a voice which sufficiently characterized as well as betrayed her excitement. "Am I to understand—"

The merchant interrupted this display of temper by an energetic gesture.

"Your mother and I are indulgent, Regie, as we have cause to be, for reasons of which you are still ignorant," he declared, "but I don't want you to say anything that will weaken, or have a tendency to weaken, Paul's regard for you. We are not yet accusing either Professor Croppe or Lord Pennington. We are simply trying to learn something about these men from your lips, in so far as you have been associating with them. That you have been imprudent in receiving this professor of mesmerism is perfectly certain. More, that Lord Pennington should even suggest a visit to such a man is proof to me that his lordship is a legitimate subject of anxiety and even suspicion!"

The maiden appeared angry at these observations—too angry to reply.

She changed her seat abruptly from the sofa to a chair at a little distance from her parents and Paul, and seemed inclined to remain silent.

"Your father takes the right view of these matters," said Mrs. Feathergill, kindly. "We are very sorry you were ever so imprudent as to visit this Professor Croppe. But we shall not blame you too severely. In these 'personally conducted tours,' the conductor naturally allows his patrons to do about as they please. I can understand, too, how a group of bright, fearless girls would readily make such a visit, if only as a 'lark,' if only as an innocent diversion. Such a step would be natural enough to a stranger in Paris. I suppose Mattie Brown or some of the other girls were always with you upon the occasion of these visits to Mr. Croppe?"

"Always, mamma!"

"So far, good. Evidently Mr. Croppe did not take your keys or cause you to write a letter upon any of these occasions. Did he ever mesmerize you at your rooms in the Grand Hotel?"

"Never!"

"Did Lord Pennington ever mesmerize you?"

The girl stirred uneasily again, and her glances wandered anew from the questioner to the distant door, but she seemed unwilling or unable to answer.

"Did you hear me, dear? I inquired if Lord Pennington ever magnetized you?"

Again there was a marked delay about the response.

It seemed as if the maiden were obliged to overcome some restraining influence resting upon her before she could answer:

"He did, mamma!"

"Often?"

"Not often, mamma, but two or three times, or more!"

"Did he ever magnetize you when he was alone with you, Regie?" pursued the mother, whose face had become as white as her linen collar.

"Never, mamma! I would not allow him to!"

"Not even after you became betrothed to him?"

"Not even then, mamma! It was during those days that I lost or mislaid my keys, and I became nervous about trifling too deeply with the unknown."

The merchant and his wife exchanged grave glances of intelligence with the young doctor.

"I will not tax your patience longer with these inquiries just now, darling," said Mrs. Feathergill. "I see you are as nervous as if you were on coals. You may leave us now, as I desire to consult your father and Paul on several points, including my further treatment. I will see you later, somewhere between now and bedtime, and I hope and pray that we may not be compelled to retire for the night without receiving good news from our detectives."

The maiden seemed as pleased as a school-girl dismissed from a hard and vexatious study.

"I hope so, too, mamma," she exclaimed, springing up and kissing Mrs. Feathergill with her usual effusiveness. "I will see you later!"

She caressed her father in like manner, and then offered her hand to Paul, but in such a cold and mechanical way as to strike a chill to his heart.

It seemed to him that the "spell" to which he had alluded was stronger than ever upon her.

As she passed the table already referred to she displaced Paul's medicine-case and resumed possession of the card and photograph she had so unwillingly given him, restoring them to her pocket as she glided toward the door to which her gaze had been so repeatedly directed.

As she gained the hall and closed the door behind her a strange glow crept over her face and into her eyes, and a strange smile wreathed her lips.

"Are you here?" she demanded, in a barely

audible whisper, looking eagerly around. "Are you here?"

"Yes, Miss Feathergill, I am here!"

And a man emerged from the shadow of the back staircase and advanced to meet her, raising his hat and bowing with pleased and smiling politeness.

"Ah, Professor Croppe!" she exclaimed, as guardedly as before, offering her hand. "I knew ten minutes ago, by the influences brought to bear upon me, that you or Ernest were near me. How did you get into the house?"

"I will tell you later," answered Professor Croppe, placing his finger upon his lips and nodding significantly in the direction of the trio in the parlor. "Slip into your things and take a walk with me. I will conduct you to Lord Pennington. He has sent me, in fact, for that purpose. He has sprained his ankle severely by a sudden lurch on shipboard and is unable to leave the house. Hasten, please. I will wait for you here."

The cool manner in which he made and executed this proposition, as well as the boldness with which he had invaded the house, would have been very suggestive to any one becoming cognizant of his proceedings.

An observer, too, at seeing the familiar manner with which the professor spoke to the maiden, would have wondered just what were the relations of the two to each other.

It was certainly a strange and impudent piece of business for the professor to present himself with such easy audacity within the very house of the Feathergills, and we may be certain that there were remarkable reasons for it.

But the result responded favorably to the intruder's unscrupulous daring.

Regie was not long in equipping herself for the proposed walk, and the couple left the house together, taking care to make as little noise as possible in traversing the hall and in closing the door behind them.

CHAPTER IV.

HAWK AND BUZZARD.

LAWYER SNIFFIN, whose name has already been mentioned as that of a would-be suitor for the hand of Regie Feathergill, was the proprietor of a handsome estate on the right bank of the Hudson River, a few miles above Yonkers.

He was an unattractive and somewhat sinister personage, with a great deal of "crookedness" in his disposition, both actual and potential, but he nevertheless believed himself to be the possessor of as many charms as an Apollo.

He was reputed inordinately wealthy, and his elegant home, in the midst of its extensive and attractive grounds, was a sufficient warrant for the rumor, but he maintained an office in the city, where he figured as an attorney and counselor, and to which he took his way every morning as regularly as if he had not been the possessor of a single dollar.

Just after dinner, on the day which witnessed the preceding events, or not far from five o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Sniffin sat upon the front veranda of his villa, looking over his large possessions and the adjacent river with an air of gratified selfishness, while he gave himself up temporarily to the soothing effect of a fine cigar.

"Evidently Mr. Feathergill does not look favorably upon my proposition to woo his daughter," he mused, with a keenly earnest gleam in his eyes. "What a beauty she is! Everybody agrees that she has taken the town by storm. I had almost forgotten her existence, not having even met her in three years, when she suddenly flashes upon my gaze as a star of the first magnitude! I knew she had gone abroad, on a 'personally conducted tour,' her mother being too feeble to accompany her and her father too busy, but I did not dream that she would return such a radiant and stately queen of loveliness! A mere passing glimpse of her at a distance has turned my head completely. I am resolved to enter the race for her hand. But how?"

A deep shadow stole over his countenance.

Upon the very face of things the problem he had propounded was one full of the gravest difficulties, as he was frank enough with himself to recognize.

"Not only did Mr. Feathergill fail to invite me to the reception," he muttered, "but our personal relations are not intimate enough to warrant me in attending unasked, although I formerly handled nearly all his legal business. I must find some method of presenting myself anew to his notice. If I cannot serve him as a friend I will certainly worry him as an enemy. In one way or another I will force myself upon that girl's attention, and woo and win her!"

He threw away his cigar and looked around with that wary alertness which was one of his most marked characteristics.

As he did so, his gaze fell upon a strange figure which had come into view around the nearest corner and was slowly approaching, with many a reel and stagger, in an advanced state of intoxication.

"Another beggar!" ejaculated Sniffin, with a flush of reprobation. "Drunk, too! How dare he show himself in the streets in such a state? I'm tempted to send him to the calaboose. Yet—stay! He may be a detective disguised as a beggar! It's perfectly certain that Margaret has lately been scouring the city and country in quest of me. I must be wary."

He arose, as if about to beat a retreat into the house, when the new-comer began gesticulations with an earnestness which struck him as so singular that he involuntarily halted.

"What the deuce can the scarecrow mean by such liberties?" queried the lawyer uneasily. "That he wants to see me?"

The question was promptly answered, the unknown reaching the front gate and appearing upon the shell walk leading to the house.

"Don't come here, my man," called the lawyer, advancing to the steps. "I cannot do anything for you—nothing whatever. Besides, my dogs are just now loose in the grounds—"

"Dogs? What I care for dogs?" interrupted the new-comer, as he halted, balancing himself on his heels and toes, and breaking down a valuable rose-bush with a single blow from a club he carried in the guise of a cane. "Care no more for dogs than for 'oo! Wanter fight? If so, come here! Soon pin ears back!"

And with this the stranger planted himself in readiness for an attack, while his club twirled at the ends of his thumb and fingers with discouraging activity.

A very strange man he was—at least sixty years of age, as bearded as bald-headed, with a stout, squat figure, bloodshot and watery eyes, almost toothless jaws, and a mouth which seemed to have been copied from a shark in action.

"I've no wish to fight you, my man," declared Sniffin, modifying his tone, "but I must beg of you not to intrude. I cannot see you—"

"Betcher dollar'll see me," returned the stranger, with scornful insolence. "Do's ye like?"

He continued to advance sturdily, and at the end of a few moments more seated himself heavily upon the steps, adding, with a mocking grin:

"Toldger so, my hearty!"

"What do you want?" asked Sniffin, with a sternness of voice and mien that was in no wise assumed.

"Want? Wanter rest minnit and asker kesson! What I'll take? Thanks! Anything happen have handy! 'Fer whisky!"

The lawyer made a gesture of disgust.

"You'll get no whisky here," he said angrily. "You're drunk now!"

"Drunk? It's a slamcalamy! Never drunk in life! Can't bear taste any kind lick! Never drink 'cept 'blige friends, or keep out cold in winter, or 'vent heat o' summer striking in, or keep off 'laria, or clear throat, or strengthen voice, or make clothes wear longer, or uzzer good reason! Need drop now to keep off cholera infantum, eggsetteerah!"

The lawyer grew more and more angry with every word of the intruder.

"Where are you from?" he asked, while mentally cogitating as to the best course to be taken to get rid of the unwelcome presence.

"Where from? Don't care where from! Draw barrel or pour bottle, tumbler or tea-cup, it's all same me! Essential is have it! Need drop now!"

"Well, you're free and easy about it!"

"Free 'n' easy? Why shouldn't be? Is 'er anybody 'ticular? Needn't put on airs 'cause got big house. Have big house 'self some day. Know where more dollars'n 'oo got cents. No airs, if please, to Duff Dockery, whose fazzer sailed with old Cap'n Seabody, the privateersman!"

"Dockery? Captain Seabody?" ejaculated the lawyer, with a violent start. "Is your name Dockery, my friend?"

The leer of satisfaction which passed over the purple and bloated visage of Duff Dockery was a sufficient answer.

"Then permit me to give you a warm welcome, Mate Dockery," said Sniffin, his whole demeanor changing, as he extended his hand. "I am delighted to see you—to make your acquaintance—to receive you as an honored guest."

The pleased astonishment of Dockery at these declarations was a picture to look upon.

"What! 'oo heard o' me?" he cried, shaking with maudlin effusiveness the hand offered him.

"Of course I have!" assured the lawyer, with an earnestness and sincerity about which there could be no question. "Your father sailed with old Admiral Seabody, as he was generally called, and was even mate of the admiral's ship, the Golden Dragon."

The eyes of the visitor rolled in their orbits.

He seemed too astonished to speak.

"Whisky!" he gasped, hoarsely, as he clutched at one of the posts supporting the roof of the veranda, and clung desperately to it, as if the earth were rolling and plunging beneath him.

The lawyer hastened to bring a liberal dram in a tumbler from the interior of the dwelling.

Dockery seized and drank it with a nervous haste and greed defying description.

"Delighted to see you, Mate Dockery," assured the lawyer, as he watched the old sailor out of the corners of his eyes. "I have been wishing for years that some kindly fate would bring you across my path. There are many things we can do together. Your father was with Admiral Seabody when he captured the ship which was bringing the money to pay the fleet which burned the national capital."

"And when the cash was 'tributed," exclaimed the visitor, "Mate Dockery had his share!"

"Of course you'll tell me all about it," pursued the lawyer, as insinuatingly as possible. "You will not lie to me, I know."

"Lie? It's slamcalamy! Never told lie in life! Like fazzer country! Always tell truth! Did it little hatchet! 'Nuzzer whisky!"

The lawyer hastened to comply with the demand.

"Come into the house, my dear Mr. Dockery," he then said, as kindly as possible. "I have just had dinner, but you shall not fare any worse on that account. I know all about you and your father, and am as glad to see you as if you were a brother. Come in. Permit me to assist you."

He hastened to place his strength at the service of his somewhat "shaky" visitor, assisting him to his feet and directing his steps into the wide hall, while he continued:

"Of course you desired to see me, Mr. Dockery? You have some especial reason for honoring me with this visit?"

Duff Dockery sunk heavily into the hall-chair nearest the entrance, and shook his head with maudlin gravity and regret.

"Not even 'ware 'oor 'zistance ten minnits 'go!" he declared. "On way Feathergill's! Got secret—menjus secret! Can roll in gold mine if like! Don't know 'oo Adam! Who izz 'oo, anyhow?"

"My name is Sniffin," answered the lawyer, with suppressed excitement—"Rycross Sniffin!"

"Crosscut Stuffin! Sawhorse Pippin! Never heard such names!" commented the inebriate, with an air of utter bewilderment. "Scuse kesson, Mister Tiffin! Is 'oo hotel-keeper?"

"No, a private gentleman. Why do you ask?"

"Wanter go bed! Tired's dog! Long journey! 'Ventful day! Nuzzer kesson! Is 'oo double?"

"How double?"

"Two of 'oo, like Siamese twins!"

"No, there's only one of me," returned Sniffin, as soothingly as possible. "Your sight may be affected with the weather. But you have no need of a hotel, Mr. Dockery. You are my guest, you know! You shall have a nice room and bed as soon and as long as you like. Shall I show you to a room now?"

"Sooner better!"

The lawyer began to be of the same opinion! The inebriate was reeling on his chair, with the appearance of having all he could do to hold up his head.

It did not take Sniffin long to assist his guest to a sleeping apartment off the sitting-room, and to place him in a chair.

"Shall I help you undress, Mr. Dockery?" asked the lawyer. "At least draw off your boots?" he added, with glances of dismay alternating between the dirty boots of the visitor and the snow-white counterpane.

Dockery did not answer—did not seem to even hear the questions of his host—but sat staring into the corner occupied by the bed.

"First time ever saw bed un'er full sail," he ejaculated, with a countenance between wonder and terror.

"How under full sail?" returned the lawyer.

"Can't 'oo see? Bed's going 'round an' round room like lightning," explained Dockery. "Wan-

ter'vent me coming aboard! But I'll show 'em! Queer sort o' bowsprit and taffrail, but I see no bul'arks, and here goes for the hold!"

Gaining his feet unsteadily, he made a lunge for the bed, with the evident intention of "catching it on the fly," and in another moment was extended at full length upon the floor just in front of it and under its edge.

"Toldger so!" muttered Dockery, with a grunt of contentment. "Happy's clam! Home morrer? Lots o' money! Live like prince! Drive drag and four horses! Have palace when like! Scoop millions."

The rest was too incoherent to become a matter of actual record, and in another minute Duff Dockery had lost himself to all his surroundings in the soundest of slumbers.

The lawyer examined him casually, to be sure that he was in no danger of being strangled by his necktie, and then closed and locked the door leading from the apartment.

"The drunken old coot!" he ejaculated, with an air of mingled curiosity and disgust. "He's the same old sailor who was always hanging about the offices when I first hung out a shingle, and always talking about prize-money and buried treasure. I wonder if there is any basis for his pretensions? How does he really live? Perhaps I had better go through his pockets. They may throw some light upon his status and history!"

He acted upon the suggestion, but for a time did not find anything to reward his search. He had nearly decided to abandon his guest when he came upon a thick wad of greenbacks in an inner pocket, which he hastened to count, with a rising amazement that brought a blush of excitement to his face.

"What a very, very singular state of things!" he exclaimed, in a tone husky with joy. "Clearly enough, I'm on the track of some extraordinary mystery! Why did he refer to the Feathergills? Why should such a man be running around the country with such a large sum of money on his person? Ten thousand dollars! How can he have come by it? I must shut him up carefully under lock and key, and guard him securely until he is sober. He'll not get out of my clutches until I've learned his secret!"

CHAPTER V.

THE HAWK SHOWS HIS CLAWS.

UPON the following morning Lawyer Sniffin was astir early, taking his way to the apartment where he had left his mysterious guest.

He was just in time!

As he approached the door a furious pounding resounded upon it which could only proceed from the old sailor, who had been unconsciously a prisoner during the night, the lawyer having taken the liberty of locking him in.

"Lem out, shay!" Duff Dockery was demanding, with all the vigor of his lungs. "Lem out, or bu'st door hinges!"

The lawyer lost no time in preventing the threatened disaster by producing the key of the door, which he hastily unlocked and opened.

"Morning, Misser Tiffin," cried Dockery, at sight of his host, extending his hand. "Hope see 'oo! Been knocking hide off knuckles! Thought in lock-up ag'in, though never saw such lock-up 'fore! How's Missis Tiffin and all the little Tiffies?"

The lawyer responded cordially to these greetings, shaking the proffered hand of his guest with every appearance of heartiness and respect.

"Unfortunately I'm not yet married," he added.

"N'r I neezer!" exclaimed the inebriate. "Never mean'er be! 'Fer liberty, doing as like and going where please. Wouldn't marry Queen o' Sheby if 'pear in 'propriate personus! Allers be bachelor. Ancestors all bachelors. Runs in family. What 'oo do for living?"

"What do I do? My profession, you mean?"

"Yes, 'fesshun."

"I am a lawyer," answered Sniffin.

"Made pile, s'pose?"

And the inebriate looked around wonderingly upon the signs of luxury and ease afforded by the apartment.

"Oh, yes," returned Sniffin.

"Glad hear it! My case 'zactly!" and Dockery slapped his sides contentedly. "Loaded with money! Have all like! 'Menjus secret—'menjus!"

"Sp'aking of money," said the lawyer, blandly, as he quietly seated himself. "I took the liberty of locking you in when I left you last evening."

"Wh'at! 'fraid run away?"

"No; but I was afraid some thief might get into the house unseen and go through your

pockets. As a further matter of precaution, I took into my keeping the large roll of bills I found in one of your inner garments. I wanted it to be kept perfectly safe, you see. Here it is!"

He handed out the wad of greenbacks he had counted with such care and wonderment on the preceding evening.

"Thanks! Shee 'oo is honest man."

He proceeded, with some difficulty, to stow away the money in the receptacle from which it had been taken, the lawyer looking at him meanwhile as one looks at a curious puzzle.

As a matter of fact, the guest appeared almost or quite as drunk as at the moment of his arrival at the villa the previous evening.

The lawyer was puzzled at this circumstance, as was natural.

Where could the guest get his intoxicants at such an early hour of the morning, and while he was under lock and key?

"Won't you have a drop of something, in the shape of an eye-opener, Mr. Dockery?" he demanded, as the easiest way of entering upon the investigation of this problem.

"Had 'em already, Misser Tiffin! But allers open one or two more!" was the response. "As rule, carry bottles everywhere—hat, boots, pockets, eggsetteerah. Whater want now is beclus! Hungry's tiger!"

"I had thought of that, Mr. Dockery," declared the lawyer, "and have already ordered my cook to prepare a nice breakfast for us. I thought I'd have it served here, in your room, where we can have a good talk. Ah, here it comes."

He arose and opened the door, the rattle of crockery having caught his quick hearing, and his cook and chambermaid came into the room, each of them bearing a large tray which was loaded with a variety of savory provisions, including hot rolls, steak, and coffee.

Somewhat abashed by this sudden invasion, the old sailor made a pretense of looking from one of the windows of the apartment until the girls had arranged the breakfast upon a table and taken their departure.

"Gee Christopher! what a beclus for two!" he then ejaculated, his glances roaming hungrily over the steaming delicacies that met his gaze. "Makes mouth water!"

"Sit down, Mate Dockery," invited the lawyer, placing a chair for his guest. "Permit me to help you. You'll have a slice of the steak of course?"

"Anything like. Everything."

The inebriate was soon helped liberally to the principal substantial, and then Sniffin poured the coffee, helping himself afterward.

"It's so much better to be by ourselves, you know," he said insinuatingly, as he took his seat and covered his front with a napkin. "With so many important things to say, we don't want even those girls listening to every word we utter."

The old sailor assented, but without speaking.

He was too busy to say a word, having begun to eat as greedily as he was in the habit of drinking.

The lawyer watched him with a mien which attested—if only by its quiet thoughtfulness—that he had matured over night a plan of utilizing his new acquaintance, even to the extent of securing the money on his person.

The silence remained unbroken until the host had made an excellent repast, while Dockery had eaten enough to satisfy the appetites of at least two hearty men.

"Now you begin to feel all right again, I suppose?" at length queried Sniffin, in a more insinuating tone than ever.

"Can't 'ny it! Feasted like lord!"

"There's only one thing wanting, in my opinion," suggested the lawyer. "Such a breakfast as that should be washed down with a little port or sherry."

"No sherry me," returned Dockery. "'Fer whisky every time!"

"Then whisky it shall be!"

A full bottle of the rarest "Scotch" was duly produced and honored, the lawyer drinking very little, but giving very close attention to the wants of his guest.

"You didn't count the money I gave back to you," observed Sniffin, after filling up the glass of his guest for the second time.

"No need count it! Know 'oo is honest man! Sides, what I care money? Can have bushel greenbacks any day!"

"Then why don't you let me invest it for you?"

"How 'vest it?"

"Why, put it out at interest. I'm a lawyer,

you know, and it is a branch of my business to invest money in the best securities and stocks. For instance, I know where there is a chance to loan money in such a way as to get seven hundred per cent!"

"What mean seven hun'ed per cent.?" asked the inebriate, taking the suggestion into serious consideration.

"Why, I can invest your ten thousand dollars in such a way that it will grow to seventy thousand in one year."

"Issle poss'le?" cried Dockery, opening his eyes to their fullest wideness. "Never more 'stonished in life! Seem be dreaming!"

"The chance will not be open to us long," resumed Sniffin. "We have about all the money we want at that rate of interest. If you wait too long—"

"Won't wait minnit," interrupted Dockery, eagerly, as he hastily drew out his wad of greenbacks. "Take it 'fore lose it. Lost other pile last winter."

"Well, if you insist upon it, I will take it," said the lawyer, as he received the money and quietly secured it in a side-pocket. "But it is understood that I will let you have money any time you like for your necessary expenses."

"No 'sessity! There's more where this from! What's use o' 'menjus secret if don' use it?"

"Exactly!" returned the lawyer, filling the glass of his guest for the third time. "I see you are sound on the financial question. You must have some very good friends to fill your pockets to this extent whenever you ask them. Wish I had one or two such friends."

"Way have friends is have secrets!" returned Dockery. "If 'oo knew what I know—"

He paused abruptly, setting down his glass, as if some instinct of secrecy had become active.

"You mean to say that I would make an awful pile of money," said Sniffin, quietly, "and such is indeed the case. When you know me better, Mr. Dockery, you'll give me a point or two, I have no doubt!"

"Know 'oo well enough now," declared the inebriate. "Know 'oo honest man! Sides they've threatened put me in prison! Oughter have good lawyer!"

"Who has threatened you? Just tell me, friend Dockery, and I'll make it hot for them!"

"Feathergills!"

"Ah, you spoke of the Feathergills yesterday," said Sniffin, with as much seeming carelessness and indifference as if he had never heard the name before. "You were on your way to see them, I believe, when you came here?"

"No, been there! Money came from them!"

"Indeed! How came from them?"

"Black-mail!"

"Is it possible?"

It was all Rycross Sniffin could say at the moment.

His face had reddened almost to the hue of beef.

His eyes gleamed like those of a beast of prey about to take its spring!

There was only one point more to elucidate—just one!

The particular family of Feathergills in question!

"Perhaps I know these Feathergills," he suggested, with assumed carelessness, when he had grown calmer. "One of my clients, for many years, was a Feathergill. Let's see—his name was Boyd—Boyd Feathergill—"

"That's man!"

"Boyd Feathergill gave you that money?"

"Or ruzzer wife did by his orders!"

"What for, may I ask?"

"For keeping secret!"

"I comprehend you," said Sniffin, whose wonderment had increased with every word his guest had uttered. "Boyd Feathergill is a man of secrets. I've had a number of them in my own keeping. Secrets it wouldn't do to print in all the newspapers, friend Dockery!"

"Ruzzer!" and the inebriate winked knowingly.

"But this particular secret! How long have you kept it?" pursued the lawyer.

"'Bout twenty years!"

"Indeed! They must have given you piles and piles of money!"

"Not so much as oughter!"

"How was that, Mr. Dockery?"

"Secret wasn't ripe!"

"Ah, it has been ripening all this time?"

"'Zactly! And it's every day getting riper and riper!"

The lawyer was thoroughly puzzled.

What could underlie the man's graphic description of the situation?

"Ah, I see!" he ejaculated.

This was merely another way of saying, however, that he was never in a denser ignorance.

"Fact is," added Dockery, "gal's 'bout twenty, giving 'ceptions, and having suitors and 'eratic friends, and now's the time when the old folks feel more del'cate 'bout secret 'n ever."

The lawyer started so violently as to cause the dishes upon the table to rattle.

The clew was found!

The secret in question concerned Regie Feathergill!

The very girl Lawyer Sniffin was so anxious to woo!

It had been ripening with her for a score of years, or ever since her birth.

At this discovery what a flood of theories and suspicions began crowding upon the scheming little soul of Rycross Sniffin.

He arose, with nervous impatience and began pacing to and fro in the apartment.

"The secret concerns the girl, then?" he questioned, after a brief pause. "I'm afraid it's a very hard one to understand."

"Simple's kizzing."

"Would you mind sharing it with me, Mr. Dockery?"

"No 'jection. Oughter share it somebody able 'tect me. Been threatened 'nough. 'Sides, now's time big haul. We'll strike while iron's hot. Secret too big me 'lone. 'Menjus!"

"All right," said the lawyer. "I will help you keep it."

He came to a halt, waiting to hear it.

The guest was slowly draining his glass, as if getting ready for the business in hand.

As impatient as he was, the lawyer did not dare interfere with the old sailor, knowing that almost any little contrariety would suffice to adjourn the proposed communication indefinitely.

Once again the glass was raised to the lips of the inebriate, and again it was lowered to the table, with such a grip upon it that Sniffin could not see whether it was empty or not.

A few moments longer he continued to wait impatiently.

Then a loud snore suddenly resounded.

Duff Dockery was asleep again, half-reclining in his chair!

It was in vain that the lawyer, springing to his side, gave him a hasty shaking, at the risk of getting into his own light by his haste.

The sleeper only slept the sounder.

What with his inordinate eating and drinking, to say nothing of a possible complete exhaustion, there was little hope that he would be able to reveal his secret before another evening.

Having reached this conclusion, the lawyer cleared the table, removing the remains of the breakfast to the hall, and took his departure, again, leaving Dockery locked up behind him.

"Well, I've made good use of my time," muttered the lawyer, with a scheming look in his eyes. "It's a great point gained to know that the secret concerns the girl. It must be something terrible or the Feathergills would not be willing to pay such enormous sums to keep this old coot from making it public. Ah! Boyd Feathergill! I'll learn you to turn up your nose at me, and act as if I were not good enough to be invited to your receptions. You'll soon find that I have a bit for your mouth. I'll avail myself of this forthcoming secret to open the doors of the Feathergill mansion; to get accepted as a suitor; to distance all competitors; and to become the husband of that peerless beauty. Ha! ha! what a glorious turn my luck is taking!"

CHAPTER VI.

MASKING ON CRUTCHES.

PROF. CROPPE, as revealed in the light of the nearest street lamp, at the moment he walked away with Regie from the house of her parents, as related, was a man of medium size and height, apparently past the prime of life, with dark bushy eyebrows, a luxuriant black mustache, and a beard of the same hue which descended low upon his breast, with a plentiful sprinkling of gray hair at the sides and at the point.

His complexion was dark, almost swarthy, corresponding with his hair and beard.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of his personal description was a considerable stoop of the shoulders, which would not have required any very great additional development to cause him to be known as a hunchback.

He was dressed rather poorly for a "distinguished professor," a dark, threadbare frock coat being about the only suggestion furnished by his garb that he was not chained down to the treadmill of daily labor.

The stoop in his shoulder had the effect of diminishing his apparent height, and this effect

was further increased by his wearing a low, narrow-brimmed beaver hat, with a rounded crown.

"Of course, Miss Feathergill, you are anxious to know when we arrived, and what has befallen us since you left us in Paris," said Prof. Croppe, as they walked briskly along the street, "but I must refer all these matters to Lord Pennington. You cannot imagine how anxious he is to see you, and that is why I am stepping off at such a smart pace. Am I walking too fast for you?"

"Not at all, sir. The distance is not far?"

"About half a mile. Shall we take a carriage?"

"Not on my account. I think walking is delightful."

The professor did not seem to be in a talkative mood, for he did not speak again until he began ascending the front steps of an ordinary three-story brick dwelling which stood not far from the center of a block in a neighborhood that was regarded as respectable without being fashionable.

"This is the place," he then announced, drawing a latch-key from his pocket.

"I remember it only too well," returned Regie, with a shudder.

"Indeed?" and Professor Croppe was piqued by her tone sufficiently to turn and look at her as he inserted the latch-key in the lock.

"This house has been the scene of a terrible tragedy," she proceeded to explain. "A man killed his wife here about twelve months ago, since which time the place has been unoccupied."

"Ah, that accounts for the low rent," commented Croppe, with a careless smile, as he turned the latch-key and opened the door.

"Walk in."

The maiden complied, but not without another shudder and a keen glance around.

"I am sorry Ernest has stumbled upon this house," she murmured. "I shall be tempted to regard the circumstance as a bad omen."

"This way," invited the professor, after closing the front door, without taking any notice of her remark. "Step into the parlor, and I will notify his lordship of your presence."

It seemed odd to Regie—it even struck her disagreeably—that Lord Pennington was not in the parlor to receive her.

"It's singular, Professor Croppe," she said, half-seriously, "that, from the first day of our meeting I have never been able to see you and Lord Pennington together. When you are in, he is always out, and vice versa."

While speaking, she had taken her way into the parlor, where a light was burning, and helped herself to a chair, and Croppe, leaving her latest remark unanswered, turned away and nimbly ascended the stairs.

It was not without an uneasy feeling that Regie found herself alone in the apartment in which the murder she had referred to was supposed to have been committed.

"Why should he require a whole house?" she asked herself. "Why did he not come direct—But I suppose he wanted to be independent."

The wait for her betrothed proved a longer one than she had expected, minute after minute wearing away until she had become uneasy and annoyed.

Her uneasiness and annoyance had even begun to develop into a keen anxiety when the sound of a crutch was heard upon the staircase, in the act of descending.

"Poor Ernest!" she murmured, her womanly sympathies becoming active. "I wonder if I cannot help him."

She acted upon the thought so promptly that she met her betrothed upon the first landing, and found herself clasped warmly to his heart, with a delight apparently as great as her own.

Lord Pennington presented a very strong contrast with his friend, the professor, his lordship being light-complexioned and fair-haired, without even a mustache, and seeming enough younger than Croppe to have rendered it a possibility for him to be the professor's son. There was indeed a sort of resemblance between them, especially in their manners and voices, although it would have been hard to name a detail of their personal characteristics in which they were not as fully antagonistic as possible.

"My darling! my own sweet love!" exclaimed Lord Pennington, in soft, lingering tones which presented a marked contrast with the sharp, brisk tones of the professor. "What delight to see you again! I see by the very roses upon your cheeks and the radiance in your eyes that you are in the best of health."

By the time he had exhausted his inquiries and exclamations under this head, he had reach-

ed an easy-chair in the parlor, with the assistance of the stout arm of the young lady, who seated herself beside him.

His lordship appeared considerably taller than Croppe, and had the marked advantage over him of being as straight as an arrow.

His garb, too, which was of the richest materials and most fashionable make, presented a striking contrast with the dark, dull suit of the professor, its prevailing colors being light and delicate.

"I am sorry to see you so lame, dear Ernest," declared Regie, with the warmest sympathy.

"The sprain is a very bad one, is it not?"

"Very. I cannot bear the least weight upon the foot, and up to within an hour or two the pain was intense."

"When did you arrive?"

"At noon to-day. We came in a slow boat, and the voyage was lengthened two or three days by this proceeding."

"You did not write me from Highlandshire or from London?"

"No, darling. Fact is, I was a little uncertain as to my course, in some respects, until the last moment, the doctors having changed their views considerably from day to day about my mother's health."

"How was she when you sailed?"

"Much better, and giving every promise of soon being herself again. I thought of writing by one of the fast steamers, and even of telegraphing, but the professor suggested that it would be a nice thing to surprise you by our personal advent in the New World, and I readily adhered to his suggestion."

"Why didn't you come direct to our house?"

"Such was my intention, dearest, but at the last minute I conceived some scruples against presenting myself in this crippled condition. First impressions are everything, you know, and I did not care to present myself to your parents for the first time on crutches. I even fancied that you might not be so glad to see me if I ventured to appear in such 'questionable shape.' Besides, I had the professor to look out for. He was so very anxious to come with me, that I could do no less than consent to it, although he is without a dollar, and I shall be obliged to pay his expenses as long as he remains in America. You see, therefore, darling Regie, how natural it was for me to take the course I have taken."

The maiden assented.

We may even venture to assert that she was rather pleased than otherwise that his lordship had refrained from presenting himself to her parents in such a state of affliction.

"How long do you expect to be laid up in this manner?" she asked, after a thoughtful pause.

"Perhaps a week, perhaps ten days."

"And you only arrived this noon," murmured Regie, with a critical glance around. "You have been very prompt with your installation."

"Oh, we found this place already leased and furnished, and had only to hire. Our landlord is a detective named Basswood—"

"Basswood!" echoed Regie. "Why, he is the very man papa has engaged to find the thieves who have robbed us!"

"I am aware of that fact," returned Pennington, manifesting great sympathy. "Basswood has told us all about it."

"By the way, Ernest, how did Professor Croppe get into our house, just now, when he came for me?"

"He was given admittance by Mr. Basswood, who has received a latch-key from your father, so that he can present himself to his employer at any hour of the day or night, if he should have any important discovery to make known. I have told Basswood about our relations, even as he has told me all about the robbery, and you will find him, when you come to know him, one of the most good-natured fellows in America."

His lordship was silent a moment, a disquieting thought seeming to have struck him, and then he said:

"Of course I have no secrets from you, Regie, and that is why I have not hesitated to tell you frankly that I am living with Basswood, and how Croppe gained admittance to your presence. But these are matters it will be well to keep to ourselves, saying nothing to Mr. Feathergill about them."

"Your will is my law, Ernest."

"I wish such were literally the case, darling!"

"Why, dearest?"

"In that case I should ask you to become my wife secretly before we are twenty-four hours older, so heavily does the time drag upon my hands. But that would be asking too much."

"It would indeed, seeing that your ankle will be well so soon and that my parents do not propose to offer the least opposition to our marriage."

"You have talked with them about me, then?"

"Oh, yes. But, tell me, darling: will the robbery of to-day make any difference in your feelings and plans?"

"Why a difference?"

"Because papa says we are ruined if the thieves are not found, and perhaps you will not care to have a penniless bride. Perhaps, too, your father may withhold his consent to our union under these changed circumstances."

"Nonsense, my dear Regie! It will not make the least difference with my affections or with my plans, if you should possess only the clothes you stand in when we are married."

"Good, generous Ernest!" cried Regie, caressing him impulsively. "You cannot imagine what a load your declarations have taken from my soul, for the reason that papa has very grave doubts of the recovery of our bonds. He does not believe that the thieves, or thief, will ever be found."

"Nor do I," declared Pennington, with a strange gleam of jubilation in his eyes, as he turned his face away from the warm, admiring glances of his betrothed for a moment. "The man who committed that robbery is 'an old hand at the bellows,' as the saying is—a fellow of great experience," and again there was a strange look of triumph in the averted eyes of the speaker. "But what does that matter, my dear Regie? I have enough money for us all—so much that I shall never miss the amount stolen from your father. Just lift the lid of that sole-leather in the corner yonder."

"Oh, I do not care to know how much money you have, dear Ernest," returned Regie. "It was not for your money that I loved you."

"But I insist, darling! I want you to know that you need have no fear of want and poverty in becoming my wife. Just raise the lid."

The maiden smilingly complied with the request, but only to drop the lid of the trunk with an exclamation of such surprise that it was almost terror.

"Why, there must be millions there," she murmured. "The trunk is literally filled with greenbacks and gold! You must convey it to some bank, or you will be murdered for it!"

"It will go to some bank as soon as my foot gets better," returned Pennington. "Meanwhile, we have a detective in the house, you must remember. Meanwhile, too, you will not say the least word about this trunk, not even to your parents!"

"Certainly not, Ernest. Only I must insist that you rid yourself of it as soon as you can. There was a murder committed in this house a year ago."

"Yes, Basswood told us about it. But that fact gives us no uneasiness. There are all three of us, you see—"

"Speaking of that," said Regie, smilingly, "I was just bantering Croppe upon the fact that I have never seen you and him together—never! Is Basswood likely to be another friend of this same retiring disposition?"

The smile vanished from Pennington's face as these words fell upon his hearing.

A very strange look came into his eyes, as he glared—literally glared—into the smiling and innocent face before him.

Such a look that the maiden started violently, as if affrighted.

"What is it, Ernest?" she cried. "You look so strange!"

"I—I had such a terrible spasm of pain!" he answered. "But it's over now."

"I am so glad, darling! I hope it will not come back again," and she caressed him. "But I must go now," and she arose.

"So soon?" and Pennington also struggled to an upright position, supporting his left side on a crutch. "But you will come again, I hope, tomorrow, when I will try to have a latch-key for you. By the way, it will be as well, perhaps, not to tell your parents that I am in America, or even refer to your visit to me. That young doctor seems very sharp and antagonistic, to judge by his questions and actions—"

"Doctor Hudnutt! Why, what can you know about his 'questions and actions,' Ernest?"

"Croppé told me what he overheard while waiting to get speech with you. That doctor is dangerous, Regie! Let us keep our own counsels. Wait a moment, and I will call Croppé to walk home with you, as I am powerless to do so—"

"Never mind, dear. I'd sooner go alone."

Good-by for the present. I hope you will be ever so much better when I call to-morrow."

And with this she gave her betrothed a final caress and turned toward the door.

"By the way," said Pennington, "your parents seem to have a great deal to say about your dabbling with mesmerism in Paris, and to have a great deal of suspicion about it."

The maiden thrilled with wonder, and could not help showing that she was startled at the knowledge he possessed on the subject of her recent conversations.

"I mean, that Croppé has reported the tenor of the conversations which have taken place in the dining-room and in the parlor since your father came home from his office," added his lordship, quickly, by way of explaining his knowledge, as he noticed the girl's amazement.

"Ah! I did see Croppé at the window, then?" murmured Regie.

"Of course you did. He was excited enough, when your mother fainted, to show himself unguardedly, in his desire to see what had happened," explained Pennington, suavely. "But, to come back to what I want to say: Your parents seem to regard mesmerism as their *bête noire*, and for this reason I think it would be well to say just as little as you possibly can in regard to all that took place in Paris."

"But I must answer their questions, Ernest," returned Regie, with a countenance which showed that he had pained as well as surprised her. "I cannot lie to them."

"Certainly not, darling," and he hastened to soothe and quiet her with caresses. "I merely mean that you are to use as much reserve and reticence in that field as you possibly can."

"Well, if that will please you," she returned, with a sigh, "of course you are a better judge than I am of what is best in such matters. But by by," and she again caressed him. "Take good care of yourself."

And with this she took her departure, insisting that he should not give himself the pain of accompanying her to the door.

"Sharp? Oh, yes—she's sharp, and so age her parents and that young doctor!" he muttered, looking after her as she descended the steps. "But I'm sharper!"

And closing the door, he tossed his crutches into a corner and ran lightly up-stairs, clearing two or three steps at a time!

CHAPTER VII.

STARTLING DISCOVERIES!

REGIE had turned two or three corners and walked several blocks, on her way home, after taking leave of Lord Pennington, when she remembered that she had not restored to him or to Prof. Croppé the card and photograph which had been the subject of so much inquiry and remark.

Halting abruptly, she asked herself if she should not go back.

She knew she was neither expected nor required at home at the moment, as the young doctor and her parents were engaged in a private consultation and discussion.

On the other hand, the evening was fine, the streets well lighted, the air cool and bracing, and a further walk by no means an affliction.

Then, too, it seemed that the restoration of the card and photograph was much desired by her betrothed, or he would not have spoken so often about them.

"When I caught the professor's eye through the hall door," she said to herself, "he certainly willed me very strongly to secure them, or I would not have been so rude as to take the action I did!"

It is easy to foresee to what action these reflections led.

The girl began retracing her steps—not rapidly, but with the air of finding her additional walk a pleasure.

To say that she was a little nervous and dissatisfied with the situation of affairs, is only to do justice to her views and feelings.

She had never been in the habit of keeping vital and important secrets from her parents, and she did not like to enter upon such a course of action now, not even at Lord Pennington's request or suggestion.

It went entirely against her habitudes and wishes to keep the presence of his lordship in America a secret from her parents.

She would have much preferred to tell them candidly all that she knew and all that had happened.

Mentally reviewing or discussing these matters, she neared the steps of the Basswood premises just as a young man, approaching briskly from the opposite direction, sprang up them two or three at a time.

The nearest street-lamp was at some distance, and the doorway somewhat obscure on account of a projecting and overhanging porch, so that Regie could not make out the form of the new-comer distinctly.

His proceedings, however, were so much like those of a proprietor or occupant—so much like those of a man about to enter the house—that she did not feel the least hesitation about addressing him.

"Is it you, Mr. Basswood?" she demanded, as the new-comer drew a latch-key from his vest pocket and inserted it in the lock.

"No, miss. My name is Appleby," and he took a step or two toward her, scrutinizing her closely. "Ah, you are Miss Feathergill."

"And you—sure enough. You are Horace Appleby!" exclaimed Regie, advancing and offering her hand. "I am glad to see you again. You have been absent a long time."

"Yes, fifteen months to a day," returned young Appleby, greeting the maiden with visible respect and pleasure. "The ship in which I went to Bombay sailed from India to England, and afterward to South America, so that I have had a much longer voyage than was intended. At the moment you spoke to me I was about to let myself into the house quietly and give my mother a surprise."

The ardent glow upon the cheeks of the returned sailor—his eager impatience—all attested how joyfully he had anticipated that moment.

Regie extended her hand involuntarily to restrain him from entering the house, while her features paled with a sudden and keen anguish.

"Your mother does not live here now, Mr. Appleby," she said gently, her eyes radiant with pity.

The returned wanderer was startled by her tone.

He looked into her eyes more closely.

"Ah! I understand you!" he ejaculated, with a shocked air. "She—she is dead!"

"Yes—dead! But you have a key, I see. Let me into the house and come in a moment. I will tell you all about it."

Young Appleby acted upon the suggestion, opening the door and giving admittance to Regie, and then following her into the hall, closing the door behind him.

The lights in the hall and parlor had been extinguished during the short time that had elapsed since the visit of our heroine, but the circumstance did not strike Regie as at all singular.

She merely supposed that Lord Pennington had returned to his room up-stairs for the night.

"Wait a moment, please," she said. "I will light the gas."

She produced a match and gave effect to this intention, remembering readily the whereabouts of the burner.

"Come into the parlor, Mr. Appleby," she then invited, leading the way thither.

The young sailor followed her, with the air of being perfectly familiar with the premises, and she proceeded to light a single burner of the chandelier in the parlor.

"The house is now occupied by a Mr. Basswood, a detective," then said Regie, as she motioned young Appleby to a seat on a sofa and helped herself to a chair. "Mr. Basswood has sublet apartments to friends of mine, and that is how I happen to be here."

The young sailor bowed understandingly, a flood of tears trickling silently down his cheeks.

"You—you have talked with no one since your return?" she said, with the appearance of being at a loss how to break her terrible news to the new-comer.

"No, Miss Feathergill. I have not exchanged a word with any one since my arrival. But what would you say? Why all this hesitation and distress? Is my father dead also?"

"Yes, both are dead, Mr. Appleby," returned Regie, as frankly as kindly. "But that is not all! There is worse to come! Prepare yourself for a dreadful shock!"

"Speak, in Heaven's name!"

"Be brave, then. You know your father was too fond of his bottle. He became worse in this respect after your last departure, and drank very deeply for weeks together, with the usual result that he became violent and abusive. Of course, he was out of his head when he did the terrible deed—"

"Ah, my God!" cried the young sailor, his grief breaking out in a torrent of sobs. "I understand you. He murdered my poor mother!"

"He inflicted such injuries upon her that she

died after two or three days of suffering," pursued Regie, her voice tremulous with pity and sympathy. "But he was not responsible for his terrible act, as I said. When he came to his senses a few days thereafter, in prison, and realized what he had done, he made the only expiation in his power, Mr. Appleby. He took his own life!"

There was a fresh outburst of sorrow on the part of the mourner, but gradually, and sooner even than would have naturally been expected, the young wanderer began to recover his self-control, as if there were memories in his soul which tended to lighten the blow from which he was suffering.

Perhaps he thought of the dissensions and quarrels which had so often clouded the lives of his parents.

"And when did all this take place, Miss Feathergill?" he at length asked.

"About a year ago."

"So long? And I knew nothing about it!"

"Of course letters have been written you," said Regie, "but they have missed you on account of the long wanderings to which you have alluded. There is some property involved, I believe, about which you had better see the corner who had charge of the case. Of course the blow is a very bitter one to come upon you in this unexpected manner, Mr. Appleby, and I regret exceedingly that I have not been able to break the news more gently to you."

"You have been very kind, Miss Feathergill, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart," returned the young sailor, who was rapidly recovering his self-control. "No power in the world, you know, can change such facts! What a home-coming it is for me!"

How his face clouded at the horrors of the double tragedy will be readily imagined.

"But of course no one will think the worse of you, Mr. Appleby," assured Regie, her face glowing sympathetically, while her eyes filled with tears. "For instance, I have heard my father and mother say many kind and respectful things concerning you since those terrible events took place. Everybody knows that you devoted every dollar you earned to the comfort of your parents, and that they were entirely indebted to you, during their last few years, for the comfortable home they enjoyed."

She arose, taking a turn or two in the parlor, and added:

"Of course you will call upon us before you go to sea again, or leave the city. Why not come and take dinner with us to-morrow at four o'clock? We shall all be glad to see you, and papa will give you a great many details and suggestions you ought to hear!"

"A thousand thanks, Miss Feathergill," returned young Appleby, heartily. "If you really think your parents will approve of your kind invitation—"

"Do not doubt that for a moment. You will come, then? You will be most welcome!"

The young man expressed his thanks heartily, as he arose to depart.

"In the mean time," he added, producing the latch-key which had given the couple admittance, "this place is no longer my home, and hence I shall not have any further use for this latch-key. As you have friends in the house, I will resign it to you."

"Many thanks. I will take charge of it," returned Regie, remembering that Lord Pennington had expressed a hope of procuring her one for the morning. "The locks have not been changed, it seems, and this key will do as well as a new one!"

A few further remarks were exchanged, as Regie accompanied the young sailor to the entrance of the house, and then the door closed between them.

A few moments Regie stood motionless in the hall, listening to his retreating footsteps, and then she turned her glances into the darkness resting upon the landing where she had encountered Lord Pennington half an hour before.

"Strange he has not heard us," she ejaculated, in visible surprise. "Evidently, too, Mr. Basswood is absent."

She glanced toward the door of a room back of the little parlor, and which she believed to be that occupied by the detective.

Still another moment she hesitated, and then she lighted a small lamp she had noticed upon the mantle-piece in the parlor, and began ascending the stairs.

At the moment of her meeting with Lord Pennington on the landing, she had divined by the direction from which he came the whereabouts of his room, which was a large front chamber, and she took her way boldly to it, knocking for admittance.

Receiving no response, she gently tried the door, turning the knob.

It yielded to her touch and she entered, flashing the rays of her light around her.

The room was Pennington's, as she saw at a glance, her eyes resting upon trunks she had seen in his rooms in Paris, and also upon clothing he had worn habitually during their acquaintance in Europe.

But Lord Pennington himself was not there.

A pair of crutches she noticed in one corner of the apartment caused her to make a very close search for him, but nothing came of it.

Just as clearly as the room was seen to be his lordship's, just so clearly was it to be seen that he was not in the house.

She not only called his name repeatedly in the chamber, but in the adjacent apartment and the halls, without receiving any response.

"How strange!" she thought. "He's so helpless, too, for the moment. Where can he have gone?"

There was a room at the rear of the hall which she believed to be that of Professor Croppe, and she ventured to knock upon the door.

No answer being given her, she looked into the apartment.

Evidently enough, the room in question had been assigned to the professor.

One of his hats hung against the wall, near the head of a bed, as did a dark coat the professor had worn in Paris.

"Both out," she said to herself, retreating. "I will leave the card and photograph on the table in Ernest's room, where he will see them upon his return."

Retracing her steps, she entered the front chamber a second time and advanced to the table to which she had alluded.

As she did so, her gaze fell upon a feminine portrait in a tripod frame, which occupied a prominent place in the midst of the books and various trifles by which the table was covered.

"Ah! what's that?" escaped her, involuntarily.

Lord Pennington had told her that he had no sister or near relative, save his father and mother.

Then whose photograph could it be?

Some public personage, some well-known actress?

The person represented was a girl or about her own age, with a type of countenance seen only in France.

The portrait had been taken in France, too, as our heroine readily detected.

"Who can she be?" thought Regie, with a vivid flush of pain and excitement.

From the picture her eyes wandered to the adjacent wall—when she made a further discovery that banished every trace of color from her cheeks.

A number of costly and delicate robes were hanging there, with other feminine garments!

Beneath them were dainty feminine boots and slippers!

"Ah, merciful heavens!" burst from her.

Clasping her hand to her heart, she surveyed these evidences of the habitual occupation of that apartment by a woman!

Evidently the lady of the portrait!

It was the first time Regie had ever experienced the horrible sensations of jealousy, and she writhed as if upon hot coals.

Her natural generosity of heart soon came to her aid, however.

Her faith in human nature was still strong, as became her years.

"I see," she mused. "Some family which formerly lived here has not fully moved out! Or these things belong to Mrs. Basswood! I need not worry about them. Ernest will explain their presence of his own volition when he learns that I have been here in his absence."

She laid the card and photograph in front of the mysterious portrait and turned away quietly, the rosy tide of life returning to her face.

In the generosity and simple faith of her young heart, she had no intention of jumping to any rash conclusions concerning her discoveries.

Emerging from the apartment and closing the door behind her, she descended the stairs.

As she reached the lower hall she halted a moment, debating with herself whether she should write a few lines of explanation to her betrothed or not.

The question was soon decided in the negative—so much would have to be said—and she entered the parlor, to replace the small lamp where she had found it.

As she was about to extinguish it, her gaze

rested upon the sole-leather trunk which had figured in her interview with Pennington, and which still occupied a far corner of the apartment.

Starting and crossing the floor, she raised the lid again, looking within.

The trunk was quite empty.

As empty, in fact, as it had been during the preceding interview, when Lord Pennington, by the simple exercise of his will upon the spell-bound girl, had caused her to think that it was full of greenbacks and gold!

"Ah! he has taken my advice," thought Regie, as she closed the trunk and turned away.

"He has deposited the money in some bank for safe-keeping!"

Dismissing a half-formed desire or temptation to sit down and wait for Pennington's return, she extinguished the light in both the parlor and the hall, and took her way out of the house, again turning her steps homeward.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS!

FOR several reasons the young doctor passed the night at the house of the Feathergills.

In the first place, it was desirable that he should be present if bad news were received from Mr. Basswood, the detective, or if any other cause should render medical attendance imperative.

In the second place, it was equally imperative that Paul should have an opportunity of securing a good night's rest—a boon from which he had been debarred more than a week by an unwonted affluence of cases demanding his earnest and constant attention.

Not that he meant to be selfish and shirk the duties devolving upon him.

The most of the cases in question had taken a favorable turn or found their solution in death, and the balance could be attended to by a young assistant.

The morning subsequent to the events last recorded, therefore, the young doctor was awakened, in his room at the Feathergill mansion, by the bright rays of the sun, which shone full upon his face through an uncurtained window.

"So much for staying away from home," he mused, as he sprang out of bed and proceeded to make his toilet. "I haven't enjoyed a sounder or more refreshing sleep for years."

There was a still brighter side to the picture, and one that brought a look of keen satisfaction to his face.

We refer to the fact that he had not been called to the bedside of his hosts during the night, and he accordingly knew that there had been no change for the worse in their situation.

His toilet completed, the young doctor took his way down-stairs to the parlor.

A chambermaid brought him the morning papers, and he was soon busy in their examination, seeming to become much absorbed in some particular subject with which they were teeming.

He was at length aroused by the entrance of his hosts, with whom he exchanged the usual greetings.

"We'll have breakfast without waiting for Regie," then said the merchant, after noting that the maiden had not appeared. "I've a number of visits to make this morning, as well as appointments to keep, and must be at the office early. Come, doctor."

He led the way to the dining-room, and the trio took their places at the table.

"Any news, Paul?" asked the merchant, as he proceeded to serve the steak.

"Well, there are two articles in the papers which I have read carefully," replied the young doctor. "The first relates to the robbery, and I'm not surprised to see that one or two of the papers are trying to make a sensation out of it, hinting that there are 'complications,' and that the 'whole story' is yet to be told."

"Is the subject of mesmerism mentioned, in connection with Regie's letter?" asked Mrs. Feathergill anxiously, as she began pouring the coffee.

"Not so far as I have seen, although one paper says that 'the case has some very singular features which may lead to further developments.' Speaking of mesmerism, Mrs. Feathergill," and Hudnutt smiled in his grave way, "I have a little confession to make to you and your husband. I have given this subject more attention than I have hitherto avowed—have studied it for years, in fact, as a proper and legitimate subject of medical science. I know more about it than I have acknowledged. I am prepared to assert, therefore, that Regie is more deeply involved in the robbery of yesterday than you imagine."

The merchant and his wife looked at their young adviser with startled interest.

"Do you think Regie wrote that letter?" asked Mrs. Feathergill, with a scared look stealing over her face.

"I'll answer frankly, Mr. Feathergill, if you will not neglect that excellent steak upon your plate," and Paul smiled again. "We're not going to worry over the developments in this case, either present or to come, if you will kindly allow me to guide your counsels, but we shall certainly discuss them in all candor with a view to their comprehension."

The lady drew a sigh of relief.

"That's what I want to do," she said, "and I need not say how thankful I am, Paul, to have such a wise counselor as you are to lean upon at this moment. But about that letter. Did Regie write it?"

"She did, I assure you."

"Then she may have given the key of the safe to the robbers?" breathed the merchant, in a startled whisper.

"She either gave it to them, or placed herself in their power to such an extent that they took it from her, as, for instance, when she was in one of those 'magnetic sleeps' mentioned! How many keys were missing?"

"Two only—a key of the safe, and a latch-key of this house," answered the mother. "Regie had entrance to the safe so that we could get our diamonds without bothering her father."

"There was a latch-key to this house, then?" commented Paul, thoughtfully. "How many such latch-keys are in existence?"

"Only two," answered Feathergill—"the one I carry, and the one Regie lost in Paris!"

"You are sure? No servant has one?"

"No person whatever! The two mentioned are the only two that ever existed!"

"In any case, you had better change the lock on your front door to-day," advised Paul. "We must at least prevent the thieves from letting themselves in here to listen to our conversations or to do us to death in our beds with chloroform!"

"I'll attend to the matter the first thing I do after breakfast," said Mrs. Feathergill, a little nervously. "From what you say, Paul, you believe the keys were not lost, but that they fell into the hands of those mesmerists?"

"Or rather into the hands of a mesmerist," amended Paul. "I take Professor Croppe and Lord Pennington to be one and the same person, and just what and who that one person may be is a matter about which I am not able just now to offer the least opinion!"

"Evidently, however, you do not regard 'Lord Pennington' as a real nobleman?"

"No, I do not. Let me tell you frankly what I think. When I excused myself for an hour last evening, I went out to get some information on this head. There is a real Lord Pennington, and he is really a son and heir of the Duke of Highlandshire, but we have no proof that your daughter's betrothed is his lordship—absolutely none whatever!"

"Then who—who is Regie's betrothed?" faltered Mrs. Feathergill, her scared look deepening.

"He's the mesmerist—whoever he may prove to be—nothing more or less!"

The husband and wife looked as if the earth had given way under their feet.

"Where is that mesmerist now?" asked Feathergill.

"He's here—in America."

"Here? Then you think he committed the robbery of yesterday?" queried the merchant.

"Most assuredly," answered Hudnutt.

"Then he must have followed Regie to New York, Paul?" pursued the wife.

"Or preceded her," amended Paul.

"The latter, no doubt!" cried the merchant, with a sudden flush of excitement. "That's why Regie has not had any letters from Lord Pennington. His 'lordship' did not go to Highlandshire at all, but took the first steamer for New York—one of those 'ocean greyhounds'! He came here ahead of Regie to make his arrangements for the robbery and to utilize the keys he had stolen! He may have been in this very room a dozen times already!"

"But what makes you so positive, Paul, that the mesmerist—Croppe, Pennington, or whoever he may be—is already in America?" demanded Mrs. Feathergill. "You seem to be as sure of the fact as if you had already seen him."

"And so I am!—if you will allow me to say so without detriment to the business on hand," and he looked smilingly at her plate again.

"But how do you know it, Paul?"

"Simply, in the first place, by the state in which I find Regie," explained Hudnutt. "She

shows in every word and action that the mesmerist is near! His influence rests upon her in a way it could not possibly do if the ocean were between them."

"Paul is perfectly right on this point, Sadie," declared the merchant, turning to his wife. "The mesmerist has not only been hovering about the house, but Regie saw him at the window last evening, just after you fainted. I didn't tell you about that incident, out of regard for your weakness, but I'll do so now."

He gave the facts as they are known to the reader, and then added:

"From all this, it results that the mesmerist secured Regie's keys; that he is the robber; that he is in America; that he has even shown himself at yonder basement window; that Regie is under his influence, and that her betrothed is no lord at all, but some unblushing scoundrel, with a score of names and disguises, whose acquaintance she made in Europe! Are not these about the conclusions you have come to, Paul?"

"Perfectly. I am absolutely certain of all these positions," was Paul's answer.

"But how is it that Lord Pennington was able to show Regie letters from Highlandshire which she believes to be perfectly authentic?" demanded Mrs. Feathergill.

"Yes, how was that, Paul?" asked the merchant, as he remembered what Regie had said on this subject the previous evening.

"There are two ways of explaining this point," replied Paul. "In the first place, when Regie is under the influence of the mesmerist, she sees things just as he sees them, or just as he wants her to see them. For instance, if he should show her an empty trunk—a trunk containing absolutely nothing whatever—and tell her that it was full of gold, or diamonds, or greenbacks, no matter what, she would accept his statements and declarations as the truth, even to the extent of going into ecstasies over a brown paper parcel and hugging it to her breast as untold millions of dollars."

"In Heaven's name, Paul Hudnutt," cried Mrs. Feathergill, looking terrified, "are such deceptions as that possible?"

"Just as possible," replied the young physician, in his quietest tones, "as that two and two make four. I have myself caused my 'subjects' to take a cane for a rattlesnake, salt for sugar, a hat for a basket, a bottle for a baby, and so on to the end of the chapter. The 'subject' sees just what the mesmerist or magnetizer wants him or her to see, and that's the whole secret of the matter."

The merchant and his wife shuddered, as if they saw a bottomless pit opening before them—as indeed they did.

"And then there is another theory we could consider, if there were any occasion for it," resumed Paul. "If the known mesmerist has been closely hunted by the police, he may have withdrawn himself from view by becoming the valet of the real Lord Pennington, and as such he may have made use of the real lord's letters from Highlandshire to strengthen his claims. How easy it is for the master to be personated by his 'man,' under such circumstances, you will readily realize. Am I right, Mr. Feathergill?"

"Entirely so, as you always are," answered the merchant, his face expressing a warm admiration for his adviser. "Although I have not retained you as a detective," and he smiled, "you seem to be making wonderful progress in that field. Basswood has failed, thus far, to give me a single suggestion, or to establish a single point. By the way, Paul, shall I allude, in my dealings with Basswood, to any of the facts you have just established?"

"Most assuredly not, sir," replied Paul, as emphatically as possible. "I know nothing about your Basswood, not having met him, but my impression is that he is very poor timber indeed! His non-activity suggests to me that he may be acting in the interest of the mesmerist rather than in ours. I propose to look after him a little for my own satisfaction. Do not say a word to him about what we know or think, but leave him to do a little something for himself!"

"Good!" approved Mrs. Feathergill. "And now a word about our relations to Regie. Shall we take her into our counsels?"

"Certainly not," replied Paul. "She is on the other side, or acting in the interest of the mesmerist. She is his victim—his helper! You didn't notice what she did with the card and photograph of Croppe last evening?"

"Yes. She gave them to you," answered Mrs. Feathergill.

"True, she gave them to me, and I placed them under my medicine-case, but Regie snap-

ped them up as quick as lightning as she turned to leave the parlor, and ten to one they're already in the hands of the mesmerist."

"Is it possible?" murmured the astounded merchant, while his wife sat speechless.

"And that is not all. As we have substantially finished breakfast—to which you have rendered a fair share of attention, I am glad to say—I may as well give you a little bit of a surprise. While we were talking with Regie last evening, I noticed that she was strongly under the influence of the mesmerist, and that her eyes frequently turned toward the door leading into the rear hall!"

"So they did!" confirmed the mother, breathlessly.

"When she left us, she went out of the parlor by that door, closing it behind her," resumed Paul. "I was curious enough to saunter in that direction, while you were exchanging a few remarks, and I heard voices. Later, I heard retreating footsteps, and I opened the door enough to steal a glance into the hall. I was just in time to see Regie going out of the front door with Professor Croppe!"

"You—you can't mean it!" gasped the mother.

"The facts are just as I tell you! Professor Croppe had boldly entered the hall, with the stolen latch key, and had been a listener to our conversation about him, while at the same time bringing his influence to bear upon Regie!"

The silence of an awful consternation succeeded.

"In God's name, where can my child have gone with that professor?" at length asked the mother. "You were here when she returned. How long was she absent?"

"Not far from an hour—long enough for a fairly good walk. She simply came into the parlor to say good-night, you will remember, and then went up to her room."

"But the idea of her going out with that man in such a way, when we did not even know that the professor is in America! How unlike my tender, darling Regie! We must question her—"

"Don't you say a word to her on the subject, please," interrupted Paul. "She would only deceive you or take refuge in silence."

"Deceive me, Paul? My darling Regie deceive me?"

"Innocently enough, I confess, since she is the victim of that mesmerist," returned Paul, "but it would none the less be impossible for you to put implicit faith in her answers. To begin with, she would probably deny that the mesmerist is in New York."

"But think what it is, Paul, to be bound with invisible chains, body and soul, to such a man!" cried the mother, in anguished tones. "What horrible fate may not speedily be hers? What are we to do?"

"I will tell you," replied Paul, and he still spoke quietly and with a smile. "You've heard of fighting fire with fire? Well, that's the only sort of action which can be taken in this case. The battle is between me and the unknown who has taken such a strong hold of Regie's life and mind. I must become a mesmerist, too! If you will kindly give me permission to act as I see fit to the end, I will undertake to withdraw Regie from this man's clutches and save her."

"Oh, if you only could, Paul, I would bless you to my dying breath! But you spoke of two articles in the paper which had fixed your attention. The first refers to the robbery. The second—"

"The second is even more strange than the other, if our personal interest therein is left out of the account," said Paul, as he picked up one of the morning's papers. "Here's one of the strangest stories I've ever seen, and one which seems strangely *apropos* of his 'lordship's' arrival. If not in too great a hurry, Mr. Feathergill, do let me give you an idea of it."

"Proceed," said the merchant, wonderingly.

CHAPTER IX.

HUDNUTT IN A NEW ROLE.

"THE article in question," resumed the young doctor, "relates to a man known as the Count de Foret, who has recently acquired a great deal of notoriety in France as a mesmerist!"

"As a mesmerist?" echoed the husband and wife in chorus, their attention redoubled.

"What has he been doing?" asked the wife.

"Among other things," answered Paul, "he has mesmerized the only daughter of Baron Uppington, one of the most distinguished bankers in Paris, and has acquired such absolute control over her that he has induced her to rob her father of several millions of francs."

The information was only too pertinent to the situation.

Mr. and Mrs. Feathergill exchanged strangely-startled glances.

"It is even said," pursued Hudnutt, as he again glanced at the newspaper, "that the poor girl has gone so far as to marry the villain, and that they have run away to America."

"To America!" echoed the listeners.

"From all accounts," continued the doctor, "the Count de Foret is one of the most dangerous and infamous villains of the day. It is believed that he practiced his acts on five or six of the most distinguished young ladies of Paris. At least three cases are mentioned in which large sums of money are involved. In fact, one of the peculiarities of these transactions—one of the 'ear-marks,' so to speak—is that the operative seems to have in every case for his objective point the securing of a large sum of money! In almost every case, too, there has been more or less forgery and downright robbery!"

The merchant and his wife looked more startled than ever.

"The method of the Count de Foret, then," commented Mrs. Feathergill, "seems identical with that employed by Professor Croppe! There is still another point of resemblance between these two worthies in the fact that the count has come to America. Do you believe they are one and the same person, Paul?"

"It begins to look so, most assuredly," replied the young doctor. "It is certainly safe to proceed on the assumption that such is the case. And if so, what a horrible position for Regie! What a frightful spell is that resting upon her! She accepts this vulgar miscreant in every character he is pleased to assume—sees through his eyes—does what he tells her—and may even assist him in his crimes! She is completely at his mercy."

Mrs. Feathergill stirred again as uneasily as if exposed to burning coals.

"There is still another point in the matter which seems most extraordinary," resumed Hudnutt, "and that is that the Count de Foret is not a Frenchman. It is believed that he is of English descent, although he speaks French like a native. It is even hinted that he is an English ticket-of-leave man."

The husband and wife sat as if petrified.

If this should be the man who had thrown such a terrible spell around Regie, how dreadful was her situation!

"Oh, Paul!" groaned the mother. "I can only appeal to you to save the poor girl. You alone can come to our rescue and relief at this moment. You spoke of 'fighting fire with fire.' Take whatever course you think proper."

"Why not telegraph the real Lord Pennington?" suggested the merchant.

"That is one of the very first measures I shall take after leaving you," replied Hudnutt. "I shall also investigate Basswood, and see who and what he is, and how long he has been attached to the Oaksmith Agency. I will be candid enough to add that I have conceived a keen suspicion of him."

"Of course you will need money for these investigations, Paul," said the merchant, producing his purse. "Permit me—"

"Or rather permit me," interrupted the young doctor smilingly, with a negative gesture. "I probably have on my person all the money I shall require. If not, I know where I can get it. All questions about expenses can be settled later."

"Of course you have *carte blanche* for everything," said Mrs. Feathergill. "We have no hope in any one save you, Paul. You alone can save Regie."

"Hush! here she comes."

To judge by Regie's countenance, as she came into the dining-room, she had passed a comfortable night, notwithstanding the terrible calamity which had overtaken her parents.

She had never looked more beautiful than she did at that moment, and it was with a profound heartache that Dr. Hudnutt arose and advanced toward her, after she had greeted her parents.

"We've been waiting for you, Regie," he said, with a brisk, incisive utterance, and with glances which seemed to traverse her soul. "What do you think?" and he escorted her to her place at the table, seating her with attentive politeness. "Lord Pennington has arrived!"

The maiden started violently, looking into Hudnutt's face, and then glanced at her parents, with an air of confusion, while a flush swept rapidly over her countenance.

"What! you know it already?" added Paul.

The girl's confusion increased visibly.

"Ah! you've seen him!" cried Paul, dropping into the chair he had been occupying, which was exactly opposite the maiden's. "You saw him last evening!"

The declarations of the young doctor had fallen upon the girl's hearing with all the force of a series of shocks.

She could find no terms in which to reply.

But, gradually, a sense of anger came to her aid.

"I wish you would mind your own business, Doctor Hudnutt," she said, with a coarseness and violence which can be accounted for only by the terrible spell which had so long been resting upon her. "You seem to have the air of being my keeper!"

"Regie!" cried Mrs. Feathergill, with a look that spoke volumes.

"Paul has done nothing to deserve such reproaches, Regie," said the merchant, in a graver tone than he had ever before used in speaking to her. "Your mother and I are more than surprised at such conduct. You have shocked us!"

"But what right has Doctor Hudnutt to call me to account, or to be a spy upon me?" demanded the girl, with resentful glances alike at her parents and at the object of her remark. "I still venture to think—"

"Regie!" interrupted the merchant, sternly. "You forget yourself! Paul is not calling you to account, nor has he been a spy upon you! He was simply mentioning the fact of Lord Pennington's arrival!"

"But in what a way did he say it!"

"Not in any offensive way, I hope, Regie," added Paul, as quietly and calmly as if nothing had happened. "You know that my every thought is kindly and respectful. If I have given you offense, I have done so unwittingly, and the least you can do is to forgive me!"

He held out his hand, looking across the table so archly and smilingly, with his handsome face a mirror of such real regard and devotion that the maiden could not resist his pleading.

"There's nothing to forgive, Paul," she said, accepting the proffered hand a moment. "It is I who am at fault. The truth is, I have been in an irritated state of mind ever since papa and mamma seemed to have such suspicions of Lord Pennington and to be so hostile to him."

"Well, let us dismiss all irritations, Regie, if such exist," remarked Mrs. Feathergill, kindly, "and give our attention only to what is pleasant. It is true, then, that Lord Pennington has arrived in New York and that you have seen him?"

The maiden hesitated about replying.

The injunction of her betrothed not to reveal his presence in New York was keenly remembered.

Smiling, and yet strangely serious, the young doctor made an almost imperceptible movement with his hands.

The movement seemed at first to startle Regie, but at its repetition her features relaxed and she became passive visibly.

"You have seen his lordship?" persisted the merchant.

"Yes, papa."

"And Professor Croppe, also?"

The girl assented.

"When was that?" pursued the merchant.

"After I left you last evening."

Mrs. Feathergill heaved a sigh of relief, exchanging a gratified glance with her husband, while Paul continued his passes, and resumed:

"Did the professor come here secretly for you?"

The girl remained silent.

"You must answer me," enjoined Paul, kindly, with a commanding gesture. "You know that I am your friend, and your parents are very anxious to hear all about this magnetic business."

"But first—what are you doing? Are you trying to mesmerize me?"

"Not merely trying, Regie," and Paul's hands moved more rapidly and firmly. "I am acquiring control of you."

The girl looked frightened and annoyed.

"You cannot! You shall not!" she cried, excitedly.

"Oh, yes. You cannot resist me."

"What! are you a mesmerist?"

"As you see," and he smiled in his most pleasant manner. "You see how futile it is to resist. No use of setting up your will against mine. My will is the strongest. You will have to answer all my questions. To begin with, did Professor Croppe come here secretly last evening?"

"I cannot deny it."

"He was at the window yonder when your mother fainted?"

A slight nod was the answer.

"And he gained admittance into the upper hall secretly?"

"He did."

"May I ask how?"

"Mr. Basswood let him in with the key papa had given him."

The inquirers were silent a moment, again exchanging glances of satisfaction.

"I have given Mr. Basswood no key," then said the merchant, gravely. "In fact, there was never any third key in existence—only two, the one I have here and the one you lost in Paris."

It was now Regie's turn to look startled.

She seemed in a measure to come out from under the spell resting upon her.

"I—I am simply telling you what Ernest told me," she faltered, with a troubled air.

"Well, there is a mistake somewhere," spoke up Mrs. Feathergill, as firmly as kindly. "But the professor was here? You found him in the rear hall after the long talk we had with you in the parlor?"

"Yes, mamma!"

"And he took you to see Lord Pennington?"

Again the maiden nodded.

"Where is his lordship stopping?"

"At the house where old Mr. Appleby murdered his wife last summer!"

The listeners all started in horror.

"But it is not the fault of Ernest that he is there," proceeded Regie. "He has not leased the place, but sublets from Basswood!"

"From Basswood?"

There was a general explosion of wonder, followed by a keen look of comprehension upon the features of the young doctor.

"Yes, Ernest sublets from Basswood," pursued Regie, "and Professor Croppe is there with him. The reason Ernest did not come here direct from the steamer is that he is quite lame with a fall he had on shipboard and which sprained his ankle severely."

It was well for her equanimity that she did not remark the curious and incredulous glances which passed between the young doctor and her parents.

"Why didn't you tell us where you had been, Regie, when you came home from this visit?" demanded Mrs. Feathergill, kindly.

"Because Ernest told me to keep his presence in America a secret for the present."

"Do you think that is right?"

"I—I suppose he had some reason."

"No doubt he had," decided Paul, dryly. "But there is one thing more we would like to know. Is Professor Croppe merely another name for Lord Pennington?"

"How another name for him?"

"I mean, are they one and the same individual?"

The maiden looked wonderingly at Paul a moment, and then stirred uneasily.

"What an odd question!" she ejaculated.

"Will you please answer it?"

"Why, the professor is old enough to be the father of Ernest!"

"Did you ever see them together?"

"No—curiously enough!"

"Then let me explain the matter to you," added Paul, with a smile. "Lord Pennington has no beard, is light-complexioned, dresses elegantly, and looks comparatively young. At least this is the description your mother has given me of him."

Regie assented.

"The professor, on the other hand, as I have seen for myself, has a dark complexion, wears a full beard and mustache, has a pronounced stoop in his shoulders and looks almost seedy."

Again the girl assented.

"How, then, can they be identical?" she asked, triumphantly.

"I will show you," answered Paul. "It requires only a little coloring to account for the difference in their complexions. The rest is a simple question of disguise, even to the assumed hump, which is simply a bit of padding."

"But Ernest is a taller man."

"He merely looks so. As the professor, he wears a low-crowned hat, and the false hunch on his back has the tendency to conceal his actual height."

The maiden looked bewildered and troubled.

"It is strange I never thought of these things before," she murmured.

"But did you never notice a general resemblance between the couple?" asked Paul.

"Yes, I have. I even fancied for a time that there was some relationship between them!"

"I should think so! Their relationship is much closer than you imagine."

"But, they *can't* be the same!" cried Regie. When I saw Ernest last night he was unable to use his left foot, or even to bear the least weight on it. He came down the stairs on crutches, while the professor is as sound as ever."

"You will find, I fear, that the lameness of his lordship has no foundation in fact," suggested the young doctor. "I will not say that he pretended to be lame, for that would be a heartless imposition, and we can more easily explain the matter by saying that he wished you to see the lameness in question. Has he never cheated you in this sort of fashion?"

"Oh, often. Once, in a street in Paris, he made me think a locomotive was coming toward us and threatening to run over us."

"Then how necessary it is, Regie, for you to be guarded in your dealings with him," suggested Mrs. Feathergill. "Do you not see that it is a wicked thing for any man to have such power over you?"

"Oh, that depends, mamma. He is my betrothed husband, you know. Besides, it would be easy for Paul to do all I have ever seen done in Paris."

"When are you to see Lord Pennington again, Regie?" asked the merchant, abruptly.

"In the course of the day, papa."

"You must not go alone. Either your mother and I will accompany you, or I will invite his lordship to present himself here."

"As you please, papa. I leave you to do as you think best."

"And you have no ill-will against Paul?"

"Why should I have?" and she looked down timidly, while a swift flush passed over her features. "Paul and I have always been the best of friends, and—and I think a great deal of him."

The merchant and his wife comprehended, as did the young doctor.

Under the magnetic action of the young doctor, the maiden was now more herself—more free from the spell resting upon her—than she had been at any time since her return from Europe.

"Well, I am keeping you from your breakfast, Regie," said Paul, arising, "and am neglecting a number of my patients. I must go now, but will come back in the course of the morning, or later."

He pressed the hand of Regie, with a mien which had all its old warmth and fervor, and then took leave of Mrs. Feathergill and made his way to the door, the merchant accompanying him. A few additional remarks were exchanged by the two gentlemen, the burden of which was the guarding of Regie from her new acquaintances, and then Paul sprang into a carriage that chanced to be passing, and in another minute had vanished.

CHAPTER X.

THE LIGHT BREAKING.

THE merchant returned to Regie, seating himself beside her, and regarding her with his usual kindly air.

"Now, Regie," he said, "let us understand each other. I want you to realize that your mother and I are your best friends."

"I know that, papa."

"And as such we are entitled to see that you are not *duped* in the choice of a husband. If Lord Pennington is all you suppose him to be, you may be sure that your mother and I will give him a warm welcome as your husband, as soon as he chooses to present himself here, properly, in person. On the other hand, if there is some terrible mistake in your views of his lordship, the least you can do is to be on your guard until we have had time and opportunity of getting at the facts."

"Oh, I know Ernest is all right, papa."

"I hope he is, Regie. Nevertheless, he told you that the professor was given admittance here by a key I had confided to Basswood, when the simple fact in the case is that I have not given Basswood any key."

The girl was sufficiently free from the influence of her lover at this moment to comprehend the far-reaching force of this circumstance.

"I suppose Ernest has been deceived by Croppe," she said, uneasily. "Be that as it may, I am sure his lordship will easily and promptly explain this discrepancy when I see him."

"And this brings us to another point which I wish to clear up," proceeded Feathergill. "According to your own declarations, you have never seen Lord Pennington and the professor together, and this fact is in itself enough to suggest, after the long acquaintance you have had

with both, that their relations *must* be of a very peculiar nature. Do you not see the matter in this light, Regie?"

"It certainly seems odd, now that you speak of it," admitted the girl, somewhat unwillingly, "but I am sure that Ernest will also make this matter as plain as day when I call his attention to it."

"In the mean time, my dear child," declared the merchant, "you must not feel hard toward me if I say, in all frankness, that I am afraid there is some jugglery, mesmeric or otherwise, in the sort of Box and Cox relations which have become apparent between Lord Pennington and the professor."

"If so it is a jugglery easily detected," suggested the maiden, with a smile. "All you have to do is to invite the two gentlemen to present themselves here together."

"Many thanks for the suggestion, Regie," replied the merchant. "I will act upon it in the course of the day or evening. In the mean time, will you grant me a very especial favor? I want you to abstain from calling upon Lord Pennington to-day, and also to keep away from the doors and windows, so that neither his lordship nor the professor can get sight of you or bring any of their peculiar influences to bear upon you."

"Why, father, what a mistaken and unjust view you seem inclined to take of Ernest," exclaimed Regie. "You really surprise me."

For a moment she seemed inclined to be angry.

"There are only too many very serious reasons for me to take this view of him," assured the merchant, with impressive gravity. "For instance, I have discovered that the letter used by the thief yesterday, and which we have spoken of as the forged letter, was really written by you."

"By me, papa?"

"Unconsciously, I agree, as you have yourself suggested. And this fact is in itself enough to show how terribly you are being imposed upon by these mesmerists. This fact, also, as you must certainly see at a glance, gives me the right to insist upon reserve and discretion, in everything you say or do, until the mysteries in the case are cleared up."

"Well, papa," returned Regie, with a sigh, "I will do as you wish. Since you have such suspicions of Ernest and his friends, it is your duty to investigate his character and status, and I am only too willing and anxious to assist you, knowing that you will find him everything that is good and noble."

The merchant drew a sigh of relief.

"You talk now like the dear, good girl you have always been," he said, pressing his lips to her forehead. "I will now leave your mother in your care, and hasten to the office!"

"Do not fail to speak to the locksmith as you go out, Boyd," enjoined Mrs. Feathergill. "I desire those locks to be changed before those mesmerists have another chance to use the key they have stolen!"

Regie winced at this plain language, but a timely thought of the letter she had written unconsciously was quite sufficient to endow her with patience.

The day proved a long one to the merchant, who oscillated nervously between his residence and office, busying himself with various duties and measures growing out of the robbery.

He was surprised that Basswood did not come to report progress, and still more astonished that Dr. Hudnutt did not drop in to lunch, as he had been in the habit of doing.

It was late in the afternoon when the young doctor came back, with a strange flush on his face, and with an air of suppressed excitement.

He found the merchant and his wife in the parlor, with Regie, and all awaiting him with the utmost curiosity and impatience.

"Any news?" he asked, after an exchange of greetings.

"Not the least," answered the merchant. "I have not even seen Mr. Basswood."

Hudnutt smiled understandingly.

"I am afraid we shall *not* see 'Mr. Basswood' again," he declared. "Nevertheless, as I have two detectives looking for him, it is possible that he will eventually be forthcoming!"

"Two detectives?" cried Mrs. Feathergill. "Ah! you have made some discovery to that man's disadvantage!"

"As you shall hear," answered Hudnutt, as he seated himself. "My first proceeding, when I left you this morning, was to visit a number of patients."

"Naturally enough," remarked the merchant.

"Then I sent by one of the ocean cables a long dispatch to the Duke of Highlandshire, the objective point of which was to learn if Lord Pennington is really in America!"

"Good! now we are on the right track!" cried Mrs. Feathergill, with a flush of joy, hope, and relief. "But of course it is too soon to receive an answer."

"Oh, not at all," returned the young doctor. "An answer reached me within three hours."

Regie sprang to her feet, with the keenest eagerness and excitement.

"I can guess the purport of your answer from England," she exclaimed. "You now know that Lord Pennington is in America."

"One moment," suggested the merchant. "Let us take everything in its order. You received an answer, Paul, from the Duke of Highlandshire?"

"No, sir, but from his *factotum*, a barrister named Gresham, who telegraphs me that the duke and his son are in America."

A cry of joy came from Regie.

"What did I tell you?" she cried, her face glowing with triumph.

"They have been in America a month," added the young doctor, "having landed in Montreal about two weeks before Regie left Paris, and consequently while her betrothed was still with her."

At this declaration, the girl sunk back into the chair from which she had arisen, and her face became deathly white.

The young doctor turned an affectionate and respectful glance upon her.

"You must be brave and patient," he said. "I have a host of painful things to say, which I should refrain from saying, if they did not so deeply concern you."

Regie suppressed a sob, and Paul continued:

"The duke and his son landed in Canada, and from Montreal went to Winnipeg and Chicago, but they came East last week by way of Cincinnati and Washington, and reached New York day before yesterday."

Regie did not even protest, but sat staring at Paul with a sort of wondering horror.

"The barrister further informs me," resumed our hero, "that one of the objects of the two noblemen in coming to America is to hunt up a ticket-of-leave man named Stiggles, who has long been figuring as Lord Pennington, and who for several months was in the employ of Lord Pennington as a valet."

A groan came from Mrs. Feathergill, but it was smothered by the joyous ejaculations of her husband.

Both now comprehended in a general way the outlines of the situation.

As to Regie, she continued to stare at the young doctor, while her cheeks began to recover the tinge they had temporarily lost.

"For full details of all these matters," continued Paul, "the barrister referred me to the British consul, as also for the present address of the distinguished travelers."

"And you have seen the consul?" cried the merchant, springing excitedly to his feet.

"Yes, sir."

The rumble of a carriage, as it rolled up to the steps of the house, attracted the attention of the ladies at this moment, and the young doctor added:

"And here he comes!"

"Why, what can he be coming here for?" asked Mrs. Feathergill, looking from the window.

"Simply to enlighten you more fully, at my suggestion, in regard to our distinguished visitors," answered Paul, smilingly.

"But who is that with him?" asked Regie, as two men followed the consul out of the carriage.

"Yes, who are they?" cried Mrs. Feathergill, in a flutter of wondering excitement.

"They are the Duke of Highlandshire and Lord Pennington!"

For a moment Regie reeled as if she had been smitten a severe blow.

But Paul was conveniently near her, and she caught his arm for support.

As she knew the consul by sight, she could not for a moment doubt the reality of the scene in which she was a participant.

In other terms, she realized all! Her betrothed was no lord at all, but a wretched impostor!

Not merely a ticket-of-leave-man, but a valet!

Not merely a false lord, but a ruffian cursed with the patronymic of *Stiggles*.

She felt ready to sink through the floor.

But Paul patted reassuringly the hand which had been laid upon his arm, and he looked

into her face with such tender and admiring glances that new life and strength took possession of her heart.

The consul and his guests soon made their appearance in the parlor, the former presenting the latter.

A glance at these real noblemen, as distinguished from the counterfeit, was enough to indicate to Regie the nature of the abyss into which she had so narrowly escaped falling.

"So, this is the charming young lady who has had such an adventure with the fraud who is making so free with my name, is it?" said the real Lord Pennington, as he seated himself near Regie.

"But he had *your* letters, my lord," protested Regie, as the best thing she could say for her own exculpation.

"Such as these, you mean?" and his lordship handed out several, including one just received from his mother, and a second one, with the Highlandshire postmark, which, as he explained, had arrived that day from the young lady who was to become his wife upon his return to England.

"Oh, yes—such as these, my lord!"

"Well, that is easily explained, Miss Feathergill," said Lord Pennington, restoring the letters to his pocket. "I trusted the fellow too much, and was at the same time careless about my correspondence, finances and other matters. When I finally found him out and discharged him, he at once began figuring in my name, and had unfortunately secured so many of my letters and other personal property that it was not difficult for him to furnish quite a batch of proofs of his authenticity!"

After a very pleasant visit of an hour's duration, the consul and his friends took their leave, leaving behind them four as happy hearts as could have been discovered in a day's journey.

"Oh, Paul!" was the first sound that disturbed the silence after the withdrawal of the visitors.

"Well, Regie?" was Paul's answer.

"I seem to have been under such a terrible spell!"

"So you have been!" and Paul advanced toward her, taking her two arms gently and looking into her face.

"I—I can see now that I never, never loved that man!"

"I never supposed you did!" answered Paul Hudnutt, very gravely and tenderly.

"And can you—quite understand the matter?" faltered the girl, as her eyes filled with tears.

"Nothing is easier. You were so imprudent as to allow this man to magnetize you, and since then you have seen everything through his eyes."

"And—and can you forgive me for being so weak and foolish?"

"There is nothing to forgive, my dear Regie. I am very sorry you have had this annoyance, but it has given me a chance to prove the sincerity of my affection. I have stood by you; I have brought you out from under the evil spell in question; you have nothing more to fear—"

"Not even that I have forfeited your love and esteem, Paul?"

"Not even that, Regie! I have *always* loved you, and never so much as now, when the last shadow between us has vanished—"

"Oh, darling Paul!"

Sobbing brokenly, she crept nearer, his arms infolding her in a close embrace.

"My own, own Regie!" he responded.

CHAPTER XI.

A YOUNG GIRL'S STORY.

In a very few minutes everything was as it should be between Paul and Regie.

They had entered into a harmony which was as complete as final.

Their happiness looked from their eyes.

The merchant and his wife did not fail to note the turn affairs had taken, and to rejoice with a gladness corresponding to their previous gloom.

"And now that everything points to the fact that this bogus 'Lord Pennington' is the robber," at length said the young doctor, in a low tone, "I think it would be well for us to search his residence. You have a latch-key, I believe?"

"Yes, the one that was given me by Horace Appleby."

"Then come."

The couple excused themselves for a few moments to Mr. and Mrs. Feathergill, and in another minute, taking a carriage, were being driven rapidly to their destination.

As they drew up at the house, Regie called the attention of her betrothed to a man who was sauntering in the vicinity, adding:

"I think he's a detective."

"Yes, Regie. He's one of the two in my employ, of whom I have spoken. The fact that he is still there is enough to tell me that neither 'Basswood' nor any of his tenants have put in appearance since an early hour this morning."

Taking the arm of Regie, he ascended the steps with her, and the couple vanished promptly into the house, with the aid of the latch-key.

Pausing in the hall a moment, they looked around and listened.

What a change had come over Regie during the few short hours which had elapsed since her previous visit!

She shuddered as she realized the awful spell from which Paul had freed her.

"The place seems deserted," observed the young doctor, "and I regard this circumstance as a favorable augury for the success of the purpose for which I am here, which is to look for the bonds and diamonds stolen from your father's safe. If Stiggles" how Regie winced at that horrible name!—"is really the thief, he is likely to have brought his booty here, or at least the proceeds of it!"

Regie started, with a look of keen attention to what her betrothed was saying.

She remembered the trunk filled with gold and greenbacks she had seen in the parlor, on the occasion of her previous visit, and hastened to mention the matter.

The smile with which Paul listened was almost quizzical.

"I am afraid that particular treasure is chiefly imaginary," he declared.

"Certain it is," confessed Regie, "that it had vanished on my return, within half an hour after I saw it."

The couple looked into the parlor, as in duty bound, but even the trunk was no longer present.

"Perhaps 'his lordship' has started betimes on his travels," suggested Hudnutt, smilingly.

"If so, we may be sure that he has not left any great amount of treasure behind him."

"We had better give our first attention to his room up-stairs," said Regie. "It is there, if anywhere, that we shall find what we are seeking."

Paul assented to this view of the matter, and led the way into the hall and up the staircase.

As they reached the landing where Regie had encountered the false lord the evening previous, she suddenly caught Paul by the arm, with a look of wondering inquiry, whispering:

"What is that?"

Paul joined her in listening, with his ear inclined toward the front chamber.

What they heard was a violent and yet subdued weeping, as if the sorrowing one had given way to some great despair for hours, or until her forces were well-nigh exhausted.

"Evidently a woman," whispered Paul.

Regie remembered the feminine portrait, with the feminine wearing apparel, she had seen in that apartment, and blushed to the very roots of her hair.

"Yes—it's a woman," she said falteringly.

"Ought we to present ourselves to her, or respect her tears and retire?"

"We can best respect her tears by inspecting them, I think," said Paul, with a stern smile.

"Be that as it may, I am here to make a thorough investigation and exploration, and the presence of this mysterious mourner can only give point and zest to our programme. We can do no less than make her acquaintance."

Regie fully shared these views the moment her thoughts had advanced beyond the first instincts of her womanly delicacy.

Advancing to the door of the front chamber, Paul knocked gently but firmly.

There was a quick stir within the apartment, as the sobs of the woman ceased, and the door was promptly opened, a fair young girl appearing to the gaze of the lovers.

Regie recoiled as if she had seen a ghost, a strange pallor appearing on her features.

The young girl before her was the original of the photograph she had seen on a table within that apartment the previous evening.

"Who are you?" asked the unknown, in a scared, startled way, speaking in French.

"Friends, most assuredly," responded Paul, in the same language, as he inclined himself profoundly, producing his card. "We are looking for 'Lord Pennington,' or 'Mr. Basswood,' madam—"

"Ah! you are a detective, sir."

"We are at least in quest of information," returned our hero, "and I shall be glad to know to whom I have the honor of speaking."

"I am the Countess de Foret, the daughter of Baron Uppinger of Paris," was the answer.

"Indeed!"

Paul's tone was a revelation.

"Ah! you have heard of me, sir?"

"Your sad story has been told at length in one of the daily papers of this morning."

"Indeed!" now cried the countess in her turn.

"This accounts for the fact that my husband left the house early this morning, and has not yet returned. What did the paper say?"

"Do you read English?" asked Paul.

"Perfectly," was the answer.

"Then you had better glance at the article itself," pursued Paul, producing a newspaper from one of his pockets. "It will at least spare me the pain of giving you a summary of it."

The countess seized the paper eagerly.

"Many thanks, sir," she said. "Be seated, please sit down, madam, and excuse me a moment!"

She dropped gracefully into a chair, and her glances literally devoured the page which had been placed before her.

A strange blending of sentiments and emotions was reflected upon her features from her very first glance at the article, and this manifestation became singularly marked when she had finished its perusal. Her tears had wholly dried, and there was a sentiment akin to a stern satisfaction upon her handsome features.

"Thank heaven! I now know him as he is!" she murmured, as she handed the newspaper back to Paul. "I have foreseen for some days that these revelations would soon be forthcoming!"

"And this man is your husband, madam?" asked the young doctor.

"He is, sir."

"Do you happen to have his photograph?"

"Naturally. Here it is!"

How the face of Regie Feathergill blanched at sight of the portrait thus placed under her gaze!

It was the portrait of her "Lord Pennington!"

Paul divined the situation from the emotion of his betrothed.

"Are you legally married to this man, madam?" he demanded.

"I am, sir, doubly married, in the usual French manner—by both civil and ecclesiastical law! I have here certificates to this effect, all in due form."

"And this man is the Count de Foret?"

"That is to say, sir, as the newspaper here so fully shows, he is known as the Count de Foret. This is the name under which I made his acquaintance and under which he married me. Of course, as is now readily seen, it is merely one of the many names under which he has figured!"

"I am glad to see that you seem completely detached from him," observed Paul.

"Yes, sir, that is indeed the bright side of the situation," said the countess.

"You knew him first as a magnetizer?"

The countess assented.

"Such is the way in which he became known to this young lady, who is now my betrothed."

"And with the same result, perhaps?"

"Very nearly. As 'Lord Pennington,' he has been wooing Miss Feathergill, and until a few hours ago was figuring as her accepted suitor!"

"Ah, the monster!" cried the countess. "I now understand many things which were before a mystery, such as his hurrying me away from this house to a new home last evening."

She sprang up lightly, and passed a moistened sponge over her eyes, wiping them with a towel, and then resumed her seat.

"I shall never shed another tear for that man again," she declared. "For some weeks past, and especially during the last few days, the scales have dropped from my eyes, and I have gradually discarded and buried all the illusions with which he has inspired me. It has even been twelve days since I telegraphed my sad news and my whereabouts to my father, and I'm not without hopes that he and mamma will come for me by the very next steamer."

"They would naturally take the French line?" queried Paul, with keen interest.

"Without doubt, sir."

"One of those ships has just arrived," added the young doctor. "What joy for you if the baron has come in her! Perhaps—"

With a wild cry of joy, the countess sprang to her feet, inclining her ear to a sound which had begun to come up from the street below.

That sound was the rumble of a carriage advancing at a rapid pace!

A breathless silence reigned within the house for a few moments, and then the rumble of the carriage ceased at the door!

"Ah, my God!" cried the countess. She sprang from the room, descending the stairs like a flash of light and opening wide the door.

Another wild cry, and she was clasped to the heart of a noble-looking and elegantly-attired lady who had just alighted from the carriage, while a gray-haired, commanding-looking man, rather past the prime of life, stood beside them, shedding tears of joy and relief.

"I am glad we were just in time to witness this fortunate termination of her life-romance," said Regie, with sympathetic tears, as she looked out upon the scene from one of the windows of the parlor, to which she and Paul had promptly descended. "The count is now no more to her than 'Lord Pennington' is to me!"

The happy girl and her parents soon entered the parlor, and the latter were duly presented to the young doctor and Regie.

Half an hour was spent in the discussion of the situation, Paul and Regie taking part in the conversation, as occasion required, and then the old baron arose with an air which meant business.

"Since we happen to be here, Doctor Hudnutt," he said, "and especially since this place appears to be the headquarters of the count, we may as well see if we can lay hands upon our stolen treasure."

The two men began searching the premises carefully, at first without results, but at length they came to a locked closet which threw the desired light upon the rogue's finances, the baron finding a large share of the money which had been stolen from him, while Paul stumbled upon the entire contents of the safe which had been violated the previous day, as related in former pages.

"Well, baron, the case might be worse," was the remark with which Paul concluded his rejoicings. "We'll call upon you at your hotel in the morning, and hope to take you home with us to spend the day. In the mean time I have men watching for the 'count,' and if he shows up here he's certain to be arrested without ceremony."

Securing the recovered bonds and diamonds under his arm, he and Regie escorted their new acquaintances to the waiting carriage, and then sprang into their own vehicle, and were driven homeward at a rate of speed which aroused the wonder of everybody they encountered.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BASSWOOD MYSTERY.

THE faces of Paul and Regie were so bright and glowing when they returned to the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Feathergill, that the latter could not conceal their impatience to know what had happened.

"Hasten to tell us where you've been and what you've brought," cried Mrs. Feathergill. "I have never seen such a picture of joy as you two present just at this moment!"

"Then we look just as we feel, dear mamma," cried Regie, caressing Mrs. Feathergill with all her old-time impulsiveness. "To begin with, I want you to guess what Paul has in that queer-looking parcel under his arm."

"I could never, never guess, I am afraid," declared the mother. "Will you risk a guess, Boyd?"

"Something to go to housekeeping with, no doubt," declared the merchant, as his eyes for a moment lost the awful gloom which had haunted them since the morning of the previous day. "Isn't it, Regie?"

"Sure enough, papa! But what?"

"Oh, I could never guess just what it is!"

"Then I shall have to tell you," declared Regie, merrily and yet gravely. "Only you and mamma must be very, very cool and calm, and not faint away in astonishment! What we have here," and Paul placed the parcel on the merchant's knees, "is our lost treasure!"

The husband and wife grew white at these words, apprehending that they were taking them in some sense that would be found illusive.

"All our bonds, mamma!—all our diamonds and papers!—everything!" explained Regie. "Just as they were stolen from our safe!"

It was well that she had cautioned her parents to preserve their self-control.

What they now experienced was a repetition of their tremendous shock of the preceding day, with this difference, however, that their present sensation was a wild thrill of joy.

With trembling hands they hastened to verify their bonds and papers, with all the other valuables, and found that not a single article was missing.

"Well, well, all I can say is that they have been recovered quite as strangely as they were lost," exclaimed the merchant, his voice vibrating with joyous thanksgiving. "You found them at the abode of our bogus lord?"

"Yes, sir," said Paul.

"It seems that he has been at the Appleby place at least a couple of weeks," said Regie, with heightened color, "and yet he told me last night that he only arrived yesterday noon."

"Then you must certainly, by this time, be completely enlightened in regard to all his falsehoods and deceptions, Regie," said the mother.

"I am almost ashamed to tell you how false and corrupt that man is," pursued Regie. "We found at the Appleby house a young lady who is legally the wife of this fraud, although married to him under one of his innumerable assumed names, that of the Count de Foret."

"What! married!"

"It's only too true, mamma. All the time he has been wooing me under the name of 'Lord Pennington,' he has been living with his wife."

Mrs. Feathergill looked almost as shocked as if she had again lost her bonds and diamonds, and stole a swift glance at the young doctor, to see what sort of effect these revelations would have upon him.

"But you spoke of the recovery of the bonds, Regie, as the first of two or more good events," exclaimed the mother. "What else have you to be thankful for?"

"For Paul's truth and devotion, mamma," exclaimed the girl, with joyous tears, as she threw her arms around Mrs. Feathergill. "I am to be his wife, after all. He overlooks all that has happened, and realizes—what is perfectly true—that I have simply been under a spell during the past few weeks, a spell that wicked man laid upon me."

The mother turned to the young doctor, gratefully pressing his hand.

"Need I say how glad I am that all those terrible clouds have been so promptly removed from our sky?" she asked. "You have only to recall, both of you, how long and how earnestly I have wished this union, to realize what deep, grand joy I experience at this moment, in knowing that you have come to this final understanding. You may be sure that you have our warmest congratulations and blessings."

The merchant joined in these kindly declarations, realizing that his present joy was all the greater because of the sorrow with which it was so sharply contrasted.

"Only one thing is now wanting," he said, "and that is to see this terrible impostor and miscreant brought to justice."

"That is a point which may be attained before the day is ended," said Paul, as he seated himself beside Regie on a sofa. "As soon as I could get time this morning after leaving you, I paid a visit to the Oaksmith Detective Agency, with the intention of looking up the pedigree of 'Mr. Basswood,' the famous detective, who is doing such wonderful things toward the recovery of our stolen bonds."

"And what did you learn?" asked Mrs. Feathergill.

"To begin with, it seems that 'Mr. Basswood' has been in the country only ten or twelve days," answered Paul. "He must have left England about the time 'Lord Pennington' did, and possibly in the same ship!"

"And possibly 'Mr. Basswood' may be 'Lord Pennington,' Paul, if I rightly interpret that curious smile on your face," suggested the merchant. "But go on with your report."

"Well, it is needless to say that our detective brought a host of testimonials in regard to his character, capacity, and experience," proceeded the young doctor, "or he would not have been incorporated in the Detective Agency. These assurances I have from Mr. Oaksmith himself."

"Mr. Basswood is English, then?" queried Regie.

"As a simple matter of fact," replied Paul, "this name has long been borne by one of the oldest and most reliable detectives connected with Scotland Yard, the headquarters of the business in London. He has been well known for many years, and has acquired wide celebrity by the skill and success with which he has handled many cases!"

"Ah, I see I was wrong in my hasty theory," exclaimed the merchant. "There can be nothing in common between such a man as Mr. Basswood and our bogus lord!"

"Patience!" enjoined Paul. "We cannot be too sure of anything in this world! While talking with Mr. Oaksmith, I learned that 'Bass-

wood' first conveyed to the Agency the news of the robbery, and that the case was assigned him at his own request. There is nothing very unusual about such a request, to be sure, but it was enough to give me an uneasiness in reference to our detective, and I proceeded to arrange with Mr. Oaksmith to cable to London for a full and complete account of this personage!"

"A good point," cried the merchant, with breathless interest. "And when will you have the answer?"

"I had it in less than two hours, sir, and have had it in my pocket ever since eleven o'clock this morning!"

"And now for more surprising revelations, no doubt!" exclaimed Regie.

"Well, the facts are a little out of the common run," averred Paul. "To begin with, we hear from Scotland Yard that Mr. Basswood, the famous detective, has been dead three years!"

The sensation caused by this declaration will be readily divined.

"In the second place," resumed Paul, "the late Mr. Basswood was murdered by a ticket-of-leave-man of whom he was in hot pursuit!"

A startled look appeared in Regie's eyes and on her face.

She began to foresee what was coming!

"This ticket-of-leave-man," continued Paul, "was bold enough to let himself into the lodgings of his victim in London by means of a latch-key, and to carry off considerable property, including various papers and testimonials, and from that day to this he has dared, when hard pushed under his other names, to figure under the name of the murdered detective! In other terms, the 'Basswood' now in New York is the ticket-of-leave-man referred to, and this ticket-of-leave-man is no other than the ubiquitous Stiggles!"

"What! the Count de Foret?" cried Regie.

"The false lord?" queried the merchant.

"And 'Professor Croppe,' too?" demanded Mrs. Feathergill.

"Yes, Stiggles is the foundation principle of all these worthies," assured Paul, "and this fact is in itself enough to show how much we lose at not having in our hands the ticket-of-leave-man!"

"But you say we may have him yet?" murmured Regie.

"Yes, it is possible."

The door-bell rung at this moment, and this common-place incident was quite enough, under the prevailing excitement, to cause all eyes to turn in that direction.

A card was soon brought to Regie.

"Horace Appleby," she read aloud. "He is the young sailor, mamma, I encountered accidentally at the Appleby house last evening, as I was telling you at lunch."

"Show him in, Mary," said Mrs. Feathergill to the servant.

The young sailor soon stood before Regie, whom he saluted with as much off-handed and natural grace as heartiness.

"I should have come sooner," he declared apologetically, after an exchange of the usual conventional greetings, "but a most extraordinary thing has happened to me!"

"Indeed! What can that be?" asked our heroine.

"I have captured a terrible criminal for whom all the police have been looking," answered the young sailor. "A notorious personage from the old country who bears the name of Stiggles!"

"Stiggles!"

Such a sensation as that name produced at that moment has seldom been seen.

"And you have him safe?" queried Paul, all excitement and wonder.

"As snug as a rat in a trap, sir."

"How did it happen?"

"Why, he had got a yacht all ready to sail, and was intending to carry off some young lady whose identity is not yet clearly comprehended," explained Appleby, "and as I am a fair navigator, and had left my name in several places for a job, the fellow came to offer me the berth of sailing-master. As his ill-luck would have it, however, I had seen the handbills and other information sent out by Mr. Oaksmith, and lost no time in handing the rascal over to the nearest policeman."

"Bravo!" cried Paul, as he sprang up and began capering over the carpet like a person bereft of his senses.

And "Bravo!" "Bravo!" cried the husband and wife, while Regie clapped her hands heartily, and the young sailor stood staring from one to another, wholly unable to understand their wild joy.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE situation was now plain.

There had been in England, a few years previous to the date of which we are writing, a noted ticket-of-leave man named Stiggles.

This released convict, for some new crime, had been hunted by a renowned detective named Basswood. Placed in a desperate situation by the pursuer, the fugitive had killed the detective. Later, he had robbed the lodgings of the dead man, securing important papers.

Later, too, Stiggles had ventured on several occasions, when closely hunted, to figure as the very man he had murdered, this course being, despite all its perils, the least of two evils.

Eventually making good his escape from England, the ticket-of-leave man had taken service as valet to Lord Pennington, with a view to keeping out of sight until the hunt for him had become less active.

Discharged from this situation, Stiggles had figured for a time as Lord Pennington, and under this name had made the acquaintance of Regie Feathergill, as related.

Entering France in due course, he had figured there as Professor Croppe and as the Count de Foret, at the same time that he contrived to figure, to Regie and others, as Lord Pennington.

As Croppe he had given lectures, and as Foret he had magnetized many young ladies and acquired control over several, going so far, in the case of one of them, the daughter of Baron Uppinger, as to marry her.

Driven out of France, he had preceded Regie to America, bringing his wife with him, and had secured a situation at Oaksmith's Detective Agency.

Thus hidden, he had planned and executed the robbery of the merchant.

Finding his career unexpectedly exposed in the newspapers, he had resolved to leave in a yacht, taking Regie with him, but Mr. Oaksmith, with his news from Scotland Yard, had been too quick for him, thanks to the strange fatality which had brought him into the presence of Horace Appleby.

All these things were not only comprehended by Regie and her friends, but they were duly communicated to young Appleby, who became the hero of the occasion.

Details had been exchanged, and Horace had arrived at a full realization of the importance of his capture, when there came another ring at the door.

The visitor this time was Rycross Sniffin.

His card reaching the hand of our heroine, she was at a loss what to make of it, the name failing to appeal to her recollection even in the remotest degree.

"Evidently the visit is for you, papa," she said, handing the card to the merchant.

"Perhaps it is for both of us," returned Mr. Feathergill, crushing the card in his hand, while his brow contracted angrily. "This Sniffin is a lawyer who desires to be received here, Regie, as a suitor for your hand."

"Well, you can readily convince him that I am not in need of his society, papa," said the happy girl, merrily, as she fixed upon the face of her betrothed a fond, lingering glance of affection.

"You may tell the gentleman that I am engaged, Mary," said the merchant to the servant.

Mary acquitted herself of this duty, but soon came back with a written message.

"Better see me," said the scrawl. "Important, if you wish to preserve the secret concerning your daughter."

As he read these lines, the face of Boyd Feathergill paled, but only to flush hotly the next instant with anger.

"The dastard," he muttered. "If he thinks to force himself upon us by this line of conduct, he is greatly mistaken."

"You are angry, papa," said Regie. "What does the man say?"

"Never mind, dear. I will see him," said the merchant, with a nod of dismissal to the servant. "He evidently needs a word or two of plain English."

Sauntering into the reception-room, the merchant fixed a cold glance of recognition upon the face of the visitor and said:

"Now, tell me what you mean, Mr. Sniffin."

"I mean business, Mr. Feathergill," said the lawyer, stiffly. "I once handled a great deal of your legal business, and I devoted my time and talents to your service."

"Were you not paid for all your services?" interrupted Mr. Feathergill.

"As far as money goes—yes," admitted the

lawyer. "But I had a right to receive at your hands a well-defined social recognition. You should have invited me to your recent reception."

"It's possible, and even probable, as I know nothing of any consequence to your disadvantage, but I must ask you to excuse the non-recognition in question on the simple ground that you have had no dealings with us for many years, and that you were overlooked."

"All right, as far as that particular point is concerned. But you have neglected to give me any answer to my demand to be presented to Miss Feathergill as a suitor for her hand."

"Then I will do so now," responded the merchant, quietly. "And all I need to say is that my daughter is visiting in the parlor at this very moment with Doctor Hudnutt, to whom she is engaged to be married."

The lawyer reeled as if a severe blow had descended upon him.

"Engaged?" he ejaculated.

So ended his dream!

But his little mind was not made to accept with proper dignity and self-respect such a situation of affairs as had been thus unexpectedly presented to him.

"Engaged, eh?" he sneered. "Well, perhaps Paul Hudnutt would be quite willing to become disengaged, if he were to be informed of the simple fact that Miss Feathergill is neither your daughter nor your wife's daughter, but the child of a drunken vagabond!"

The pale, angry face of Boyd Feathergill cleared almost as soon as these words had ceased to resound in the apartment.

"This is your farewell shot, I suppose?" he replied, with quiet dignity. "At any rate, I must ask you to leave my house without further delay. I have nothing more to say to you!"

"Well, I have a few words to say to you, sir, and especially a few questions to ask about the agency of your pretended daughter in this pretended robbery about which your creditors are becoming anxious—"

"Silence, sir! Get out of my house, or I'll have you taken out by the police. Go!"

"Oh, I'm willing to go. But I'll take care that you see visitors quite as disagreeable as myself, Boyd Feathergill."

"Go, I say!"

The lawyer saw that a storm was threatened and hastened to take his departure.

There was hardly a trace of annoyance on the face of the merchant as he returned to the presence of his wife and daughter, but Regie was quick to notice it.

"I see that Mr. Sniffin has annoyed you, papa," she said. "Will you tell me the nature of the trouble?"

The merchant drew the fair girl to his heart, smoothing the hair upon her shapely temples and looking as yearningly as lovingly into her clear eyes.

"Are you very happy in Paul's love?" he asked.

"Oh! so happy!"

"Then it is a good hour for me to do away with all secrets and reserves, and take you fully into my confidence. You could not be dearer if you were really our own flesh and blood, my wife's and mine, and I know you will never see any diminution of that affection with which we have always sought to surround you—"

"Oh, papa!"

"But you are not our daughter except by adoption!"

For a few moments Regie stood as if petrified, her eyes displaying a pain and terror which had never before been seen in them.

"Then who am I?" she finally managed to articulate.

"Your mother was a Miss Candlish, an orphan, and my wife's dearest friend. She fell in love with a rough and rude man-of-war's-man named Duff Dockery, who had some dashing and pleasant qualities, but who turned out to be shiftless and drunken, and who became speedily a terror and scourge for your mother. She died when you were a little more than a year old, and her last words were to commend you to my wife's care."

"My poor mother!" and tears appeared in the gentle eyes of Regie.

"It was easy for us to arrange with your father for your adoption, and we took you to our hearts and home as gladly as we could have taken a child of our own. But from that day to this your father has been our torment. As often as he wants money, he threatens us with an exposure of the secret, saying that he will get speech with you and tell you all. Very naturally, we shrink from having such a father

forced upon your attention, and that is why we have always allowed Mr. Dockery to live upon us!"

"And this is the whole secret, papa?"

"This is all of it, darling."

"Then let it be no more to us hereafter than a breath of air or a drop of water," declared Regie, as she caressed the merchant with newfound tenderness. "I shall always be your own loving daughter, and all you have now said is simply a hint for me to allow nothing or no one to ever place the least shadow between us!"

"Thanks, my darling daughter! And the last fear and reserve being thus swept forever from our path, we can give ourselves up unreservedly to the gladness which has dawned upon us!"

With another fond caress, the couple advanced to the sofa where Mrs. Feathergill was reclining.

"Papa has told me all, dear mamma," communicated Regie, with a tender caress for almost every word, "and you may be sure that I will love you as fervently always as I could have loved my own dear mother! No shadow can ever descend upon our pathway again, dear mamma!"

Taken back in due course to England, the ticket-of-leave man received the punishment his crimes so richly deserved.

Thus left a widow, the baron's daughter was free to go into society again, and made a brilliant and happy match within a year of her return to France, with her father and mother.

Duff Dockery has "turned up" two or three times at the elegant home of Regie and her husband, but his daughter treats him so kindly that he is really ashamed to make himself a nuisance, and soon goes away to enjoy himself in more congenial quarters.

Mr. Feathergill and his wife are enjoying better health this winter than for many long years before, and their medical adviser playfully accounts for the fact by saying that they evidently "live again" in the little Paul Hudnutt who has long since put in an appearance, and who has already become the joy of the two households.

And so peace, honor and happiness having come in due course to all the characters of our tale who deserved these blessings, we have only to lay down the pen and thank our readers for their kindly attention, wishing them their share of life's divinest favors, both in this world and in that better life which is to come.

THE END.

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